

In Memory  
of  
James B. Graham







SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES.

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# SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES.

BY

FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER, D.D.

PRIEST OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI.

“ La raison sans cesse raisonne,  
Et jamais n'a guéri personne. ’



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TO MY HEARERS  
IN THE  
CHURCH OF THE LONDON ORATORY

This Volume is Dedicated,  
WITH MANY AFFECTIONATE RECOLLECTIONS  
AND  
A SENSE OF DEEP RESPONSIBILITY



## P R E F A C E.

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DURING the Advents, Lents, and Months of Mary, I have been accustomed to preach in the Church of the Oratory on points connected with the spiritual life. These Addresses have been very familiar, and also, from long personal intercourse with my hearers, more intimate and affectionate than such Addresses would have been under different circumstances. I enjoyed the highest liberty which a preacher can have,—a tolerable certainty that I should not be misunderstood, at least by those who habitually heard me; and of strangers and chance auditors I naturally took no account.

As these Addresses had neither the formality of Lectures, nor the dignity of Sermons, I have been accustomed to call them Conferences, using the word rather in a foreign than a native sense. A selection from these is now presented to the reader as nearly in the form in which they were preached as I could remember.

It has been my custom to have the notes of them,

very full and detailed, prepared several weeks, often several months, before delivering them. They were then revised before preaching, and very often annotated immediately after preaching, when necessary or desirable changes struck me in the act and fervour of delivery. There is nothing which brings out any want of logical sequence, or any disproportionate arrangement of thoughts, more vividly than the act of preaching, and I have repeatedly profited by this fact. The notes were then laid aside, some for two years, some for one year, some for a few months, before I finally revised them for writing, and at last wrote them out. I have long adopted this custom with what concerned the Spiritual Life, so as to secure myself from putting forth mere views struck out in a heat, and also that I might convert the opinions expressed, whatever their intrinsic value might be, into judgments ascertained with care, matured by experience, and revised with jealous repetition under various circumstances and in different moods of mind.

There is a sort of general unity in the selection which occupies this volume, as the Conferences will be found in the whole to apply to matters closely related among themselves, and proper either to one stage of the Spiritual Life, or to stages which have a close affinity with each other. They embody, also, certain views on the relation of grace to natural character, and on what may be called the Natural Side of the



Supernatural Life, which I regard as being of considerable importance in these times, and to which I may hope to do more justice in a distinct work. I have purposely put them forward now in an unformal way, though they lie as a complete and coherent system in my own mind.

The publication of these Conferences, though not an unwilling one, is due to the persuasion of others. For I have been held back by the fear, and indeed the certainty, that I could not expect, among the general readers of a book, that safe interpretation of familiar affection, which makes even voice and look contribute to secure me, with my habitual hearers, from being misunderstood in the chair of the Oratory.

FRED W. FABER.

THE LONDON ORATORY,  
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1858.



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# SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES.

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## KINDNESS.

### I.

#### ON KINDNESS IN GENERAL.

THE weakness of man, and the way in which he is at the mercy of external accidents in the world, has always been a favourite topic with the moralists. They have expatiated upon it with so much amplitude of rhetorical exaggeration, that it has at last produced in our minds a sense of unreality, against which we rebel. Man is no doubt very weak. He can only be passive in a thunderstorm, or run in an earthquake. The odds are against him when he is managing his ship in a hurricane, or when pestilence is raging in the house where he lives. Heat and cold, draught and rain, are his masters. He is weaker than an elephant, and subordinate to the east wind. This is all very true. Nevertheless man has considerable powers, considerable enough to leave him, as proprietor of this planet, in possession of at least as much comfortable jurisdiction as most landed proprietors have in a free country. He has one power in particular, which is not sufficiently dwelt on, and with which we will at present occupy ourselves. It is the power of making the world happy, or at least of so greatly

diminishing the amount of unhappiness in it, as to make it quite a different world from what it is at present. This power is called kindness. The worst kinds of unhappiness, as well as the greatest amount of it, come from our conduct to each other. If our conduct, therefore, were under the control of kindness, it would be nearly the opposite of what it is, and so the state of the world would be almost reversed. We are for the most part unhappy, because the world is an unkind world. But the world is only unkind for the lack of kindness in us units who compose it. Now if all this is but so much as half true, it is plainly worth our while to take some trouble to gain clear and definite notions of kindness. We practice more easily what we already know clearly.

We must first ask ourselves what kindness is. Words, which we are using constantly, soon cease to have much distinct meaning in our minds. They become symbols and figures rather than words, and we content ourselves with the general impression they make upon us. Now let us be a little particular about kindness, and describe it as accurately as we can. Kindness is the overflowing of self upon others. We put others in the place of self. We treat them as we would wish to be treated ourselves. We change places with them. For the time self is another, and others are self. Our self love takes the shape of complacency in unselfishness. We cannot speak of the virtues without thinking of God. What would the overflow of self upon others be in Him the Ever-blessed and Eternal? It was the act of creation. Creation was divine kindness. From it as from a fountain, flow the possibilities, the powers, the blessings of all created kindness. This is an honourable genealogy for kindness. Then, again, kindness is the coming to the rescue of others, when they need it and it is in our power to supply what they need; and this is the work of

the Attributes of God towards His creatures. His omnipotence is for ever making up our deficiency of power. His justice is continually correcting our erroneous judgments. His mercy is always consoling our fellow-creatures under our hardheartedness. His truth is perpetually hindering the consequences of our falsehood. His omniscience makes our ignorance succeed as if it were knowledge. His perfections are incessantly coming to the rescue of our imperfections. This is the definition of Providence; and kindness is our imitation of this divine action.

Moreover, kindness is also like divine grace; for it gives men something which neither self nor nature can give them. What it gives them is something of which they are in want, or something which only another person can give, such as consolation; and besides this, the manner in which this is given is a true gift itself, better far than the thing given: and what is all this but an allegory of grace? Kindness adds sweetness to everything. It is kindness which makes life's capabilities blossom, and paints them with their cheering hues, and endows them with their invigorating fragrance. Whether it waits on its superiors, or ministers to its inferiors, or disports itself with its equals, its work is marked by a prodigality which the strictest discretion cannot blame. It does unnecessary work, which when done, looks the most necessary work that could be. If it goes to soothe a sorrow, it does more than soothe it. If it relieves a want, it cannot do so without doing more than relieve it. Its manner is something extra, and is the choice thing in the bargain. Even when it is economical in what it gives, it is not economical of the gracefulness with which it gives it. But what is all this like, except the exuberance of the divine government? See how, turn which way we will, kindness is entangled with the thought of God! Last of all, the secret impulse out of which kindness acts is an instinct which is

the noblest part of ourselves, the most undoubted remnant of the image of God, which was given us at the first. We must therefore never think of kindness as being a common growth of our nature, common in the sense of being of little value. It is the nobility of man. In all its modifications it reflects a heavenly type. It runs up into eternal mysteries. It is a divine thing rather than a human one, and it is human because it springs from the soul of man just at the point where the divine image was graven deepest.

Such is kindness. Now let us consider its office in the world, in order that we may get a clearer idea of itself. It makes life more endurable. The burden of life presses heavily upon multitudes of the children of men. It is a yoke, very often of such a peculiar nature, that familiarity, instead of practically lightening it, makes it harder to bear. Perseverance is the hand of time pressing the yoke down upon our galled shoulders with all its might. There are many men to whom life is always approaching the unbearable. It stops only just short of it. We expect it to transgress every moment. But, without having recourse to these extreme cases, sin alone is sufficient to make life intolerable to a virtuous man. Actual sin is not essential to this. The possibility of sinning, the danger of sinning, the facility of sinning, the temptation to sin, the example of so much sin around us, and, above all, the sinful unworthiness of men much better than ourselves,—these are sufficient to make life drain us to the last dregs of our endurance. In all these cases it is the office of kindness to make life more bearable; and if its success in its office is often only partial, some amount of success is at least invariable.

It is true that we make ourselves more unhappy than other people make us. No slight portion of this self-inflicted unhappiness arises from our sense of justice being so continually wounded by the events of life, while the incessant



friction of the world never allows the wound to heal. There are some men whose practical talents are completely swamped by the keenness of their sense of injustice. They go through life as failures, because the pressure of injustice upon themselves, or the sight of its pressing upon others, has unmanned them. If they begin a line of action, they cannot go through with it. They are perpetually shying, like a mettlesome horse, at the objects by the road side. They had much in them; but they have died without anything coming of them. Kindness steps forward to remedy this evil also. Each solitary kind action that is done, the whole world over, is working briskly in its own sphere to restore the balance between right and wrong. The more kindness there is on the earth at any given moment, the greater is the tendency of the balance between right and wrong to correct itself, and remain in equilibrium. Nay, this is short of the truth. Kindness allies itself with right to invade the wrong, and beat it off the earth. Justice is necessarily an aggressive virtue, and kindness is the amiability of justice.

Mindful of its divine origin, and of its hereditary descent from the primal act of creation, this dear virtue is for ever entering into God's original dispositions as Creator. He meant the world to be a happy world; and kindness means it also. He gave it the power to be happy; and kindness was a great part of that very power. By His benediction He commanded creation to be happy; kindness, with its usual genial spirit of accommodation, now tries to persuade a world which has dared to disobey a divine command. God looks over the fallen world, and repents that He made man. Kindness sees less clearly the ruin of God's original idea than it sees still that first beneficent idea, and it sets to work to cleanse what is defiled, and to restore what is defaced. It sorrows over sin, but, like buoyant-hearted men, it finds in its sorrow the best impulse of its activity.

It is labouring always in ten thousand places, and the work at which it labours is always the same, to make God's world more like His original conception of it.

But, while it thus ministers to Him as Creator, it is no less energetic and successful in preparing and enlarging His ways as Saviour. It is constantly winning strayed souls back to Him, opening hearts that seemed obstinately closed, enlightening minds that had been wilfully darkened, skilfully throwing the succours of hope into strongholds that were on the point of capitulating to despair, lifting endeavour from low to high, from high to higher, from higher to highest. Everywhere kindness is the best pioneer of the Precious Blood. We often begin our own repentance by acts of kindness, or through them. Probably the majority of repentances have begun in the reception of acts of kindness, which, if not unexpected, touched men by the sense of their being so undeserved. Doubtless the terrors of the Lord are often the beginning of that wisdom, which we name conversion; but men must be frightened in a kind way, or the fright will only make them unbelievers. Kindness has converted more sinners than either zeal, eloquence, or learning; and these three last have never converted any one, unless they were kind also. In short, kindness makes us as Gods to each other. Yet, while it lifts us so high, it sweetly keeps us low. For the continual sense, which a kind heart has, of its own need of kindness, keeps it humble. There are no hearts to which kindness is so indispensable, as those that are exuberantly kind themselves.

But let us look at the matter from another point. What does kindness do for those to whom we show it? We have looked at its office on a grand scale in the whole world; let us narrow our field of observation, and see what it does for those who are its immediate objects. What we note first, as of great consequence, is the immense power of kindness

in bringing out the good points of the characters of others. Almost all men have more goodness in them than the ordinary intercourse of the world enables us to discover. Indeed, most men, we may be sure from glimpses we now and then obtain, carry with them to the grave much undeveloped nobility. Life is seldom so varied or so adventurous, as to enable a man to unfold all that is in him. A creature, who has got capabilities in him to live for ever, can hardly have room in threescore years to do more than give specimens of what he might be, and will be. But, beside this, who has not seen how disagreeable and faulty characters will expand under kindness? Generosity springs up, fresh and vigorous, from under a superincumbent load of meanness. Modesty suddenly discloses itself from some safe cavern where it has survived years of sin. Virtues come to life, and in their infantine robustness, strangle habits which a score of years has been spent in forming. It is wonderful what capabilities grace can find in the most unpromising character. It is a thing to be much pondered. Duly reflected on, it might alter our view of the world altogether. But kindness does not reveal these things to us external spectators only. It reveals a man to himself. It rouses the long dormant self-respect with which grace will speedily ally itself, and purify it by its alliance. Neither does it content itself with making a revelation. It develops as well as reveals. It gives these newly disclosed capabilities of virtue, vigour and animation. It presents them with occasions. It even trains and tutors them. It causes the first actions of the recovering soul to be actions on high principles and from generous motives. It shields and defends moral convalescence from the dangers which beset it. A kind act has picked up many a fallen man, who has afterwards slain his tens of thousands for his Lord, and has entered the Heavenly City at last as a conqueror, amidst

the acclamations of the saints, and with the welcome of his sovereign.

It is not improbable that no man ever had a kind action done to him, who did not in consequence commit a sin less than he otherwise would have done. I can look out over the earth at any hour, and I see in spirit innumerable angels threading the crowds of men, and hindering sin by all manner of artifices which shall not interfere with the freedom of man's will. I see also invisible grace, made visible for the moment, flowing straight from God in and upon and around the souls of men, and sin giving way, and yielding place to it. It is only in the deserts that I do not see it, and on the tracts of shipless seas, and the fields of polar ice. But together with grace and the angels, there is a third band of diminutive figures, with veils upon their heads, which are flitting everywhere, making gloomy men smile, and angry men grow meek, and sick men cease to groan, lighting up hope in the eyes of the dying, sweetening the heart of the bitter, and adroitly turning men away from sin just when they are on the point of committing it. They seem to have strange power. Men listen to them, who have been deaf to the pleading of angels. They gain admittance into hearts, before the doors of which grace has lost its patience and gone away. No sooner are the doors open than these veiled messengers, these cunning ministers of God, have gone and returned with lightning-like speed, and brought grace back with them. They are most versatile in their operations. One while they are the spies of grace, another while its sappers and miners, another while its light cavalry, another while they bear the brunt of the battle, and for more than five thousand years they have hardly known the meaning of defeat. These are the acts of kindness, which are daily enrolled in God's service from the rising to the setting of the sun; and this is the second

work they do in souls, to lessen the number of their sins. There are few gifts more precious to a soul than to make its sins fewer. It is in our power to do this almost daily, and sometimes often in a day.

Another work, which our kindness does in the hearts of others, is to encourage them in their efforts after good. Habits of sin, even when put to death as habits, leave many evil legacies behind them. One of the most disastrous parts of their inheritance is discouragement. There are few things which resist grace as it does. Obstinacy even is more hopeful. We may see floods of grace descend upon the disheartened soul, and it shows no symptoms of reviving. Grace runs off it, as the rain runs from the roofs. Whichever of its three forms, peevishness, lethargy, or delusion, it may assume, God's mercy must lay regular siege to it, or it will never be taken. But we all of us need encouragement to do good. The path of virtue, even when it is not uphill, is rough and stony, and each day's journey is a little longer than our strength admits of, only there are no means of shortening it. The twenty-four hours are the same to everybody, except the idle, and to the idle they are thirty-six, for weariness and dullness. You may love God, and love Him truly, as you do, and high motives may be continually before you. Nevertheless you must be quite conscious to yourself of being soon fatigued, nay perhaps of a normal lassitude growing with your years; and you must remember how especially the absence of sympathy tried you, and how all things began to look like delusion because no one encouraged you in your work. Alas! how many noble hearts have sunk under this not ignoble weariness! How many plans for God's glory have fallen to the ground, which a bright look or a kind eye would have propped up! But either because we were busy with our own work and never looked at that of others, or because we were jealous and

looked coldly and spoke critically, we have not come with this facile succour to the rescue, not so much of our brother, as of our dearest Lord Himself! How many institutions for the comfort of the poor, or the saving of souls, have languished, more for want of approbation than of money; and though sympathy is so cheap, the lone priest has struggled on till his solitude, his weariness, and his lack of sympathy have almost blamelessly given way beneath the burden, and the wolves have rushed in upon that little nook of his Master's sheepfold, which he had so lovingly partitioned off as his own peculiar work! O what a wretched thing it is to be unkind! I think, with the thought of the Precious Blood, I can better face my sins at the last judgment, than my unkindness, with all its miserable fertility of evil consequences. But, if we have no notion of the far-reaching mischief which unkindness does, so neither can we rightly estimate the good which kindness may do. Very often a heart is drooping. It is bending over itself lower and lower. The cloud of sadness thickens. Temptations lie all around, and are multiplying in strength and number every moment. Everything forebodes approaching sin. Not so much as a kind action, not so much as a kind word, but the mere tone of voice, the mere fixing of the eye, has conveyed sympathy to the poor suffering heart, and all is right again in one instant. The downcast soul has revived under that mere peep of human sunshine, and is encouraged to do bravely the very thing which in despondency it had almost resolved to leave undone. That coming sin might have been the soul's first step to an irretrievable ruin. That encouragement may be the first link of a new chain, which, when its length is finished, shall be called final perseverance.

Few men can do without praise, and there are few circumstances under which a man can be praised without injuring him. Here is a difficulty. It is wise to take a kindly view



of all human infirmities, but it is not wise to humour them in act. Some men can do without the praise of others, because their own is so unfailing. Their vanity enables them to find self-praise sufficient. Vanity is the most comfortable of vices. The misfortune is, that nevertheless it is a vice. Some try to do without praise, and grow moody and critical, which shows their grace was not adequate for their attempt. Some do without praise, because they are all for God : but alas ! it would not occupy us long to take the census of that portion of the world's population. Most men must have praise. Their fountains dry up without it. Every one in authority knows this well enough. He has to learn to praise without seeming to praise. Now kindness has all the virtues of praise without its vices. It is equally medicinal without having the poisonous qualities. When we are praised, we are praised at some expense, and at our own expense. Kindness puts us to no expense, while it enriches those who are kind to us. Praise always implies some degree of condescension ; and condescension is a thing intrinsically ungraceful, whereas kindness is the most graceful attitude one man can assume towards another. So here is another work it does. It supplies the place of praise. It is in fact the only sort of praise which does not injure, the only sort which is always and everywhere true, the only kind which those who are afraid of growing conceited may welcome safely.

Moreover kindness is infectious. No kind action ever stopped with itself. Fecundity belongs to it in its own right. One kind action leads to another. By one we commit ourselves to more than one. Our example is followed. The single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make fresh trees, and the rapidity of the growth is equal to its extent. But this fertility is not confined to ourselves, or to others who may

be kind to the same person to whom we have been kind. It is chiefly to be found in the person himself whom we have benefited. This is the greatest work which kindness does to others, that it makes them kind themselves. The kindest men are generally those who have received the greatest number of kindnesses. It does indeed sometimes happen, according to the law which in noble natures produces good out of evil, that men who have had to feel the want of kindness are themselves lavishly kind when they have the power. But in general, the rule is, that kindness makes men kind. As we become kinder ourselves by practising kindness, so the objects of our kindness, if they were kind before, learn now to be kinder, and to be kind now if they were never so before. Thus does kindness propagate itself on all sides. Perhaps an act of kindness never dies, but extends the invisible undulations of its influence over the breadth of centuries. Thus, for all these reasons, there is no better thing, which we can do for others, than to be kind to them; and our kindness is the greatest gift they can receive, except the grace of God.

There is always a certain sort of selfishness in the spiritual life. The order of charity rules it so. Our first consideration is the glory of God in the salvation of our own souls. We must take hold of this glory by that handle first of all. Everything will be presumption and delusion, if it is taken in any other order. Hence, even while speaking of kindness, it is not out of place for us to consider the work which it does for ourselves. We have seen what it does for the world. We have seen what it does for our neighbours. Now let us see how it blesses ourselves. To be kind to ourselves is a very peculiar feature of the spiritual life, but does not come within our range at present. Foremost among the common ways in which kind actions benefit ourselves may be mentioned the help they give us in getting clear of selfish-



ness. The tendency of nature to love itself has more the character of a habit than a law. Opposite conduct always tends to weaken it, which would hardly be the case if it were a law. Kindness, moreover, partly from the pleasure which accompanies it, partly from the blessing it draws down upon itself, and partly from its similitude to God, tends very rapidly to set into a well-formed habit. Selfishness is in no slight degree a point of view from which we regard things. Kindness alters our view by altering our point of view. Now does anything tease us more than our selfishness? Does anything more effectually retard our spiritual growth? Selfishness indeed furnishes us with a grand opportunity, the opportunity of getting to hate ourselves, because of the odiousness of this self-worship. But how few of us have got either the depth or the bravery to profit by this magnificent occasion! On the whole selfishness must be put down, or our progress will cease. A series of kind actions turned against it with playful courage,—and selfishness is, I will not say killed, but stunned; and that is a great convenience, though it is not the whole work accomplished. Perhaps we may never come to be quite unselfish. However, there is but one road towards that, which is kindness; and every step taken on that road is a long stride heavenwards.

Kindness seems to know of some secret fountain of joy deep in the soul, which it can touch without revealing its locality, and cause to send its waters upwards, and overflow the heart. Inward happiness almost always follows a kind action; and who has not long since experienced in himself, that inward happiness is the atmosphere in which great things are done for God? Furthermore, kindness is a constant godlike occupation, and implies many supernatural operations in those who practise kindness upon the motives of faith. Much grace goes along with kindness, collateral

graces more than sufficient in themselves to make a saint. Observation would lead us to the conclusion, that kindness is not a native of the land of youth. Men grow kinder as they grow older. There are, of course, natures which are kindly from the cradle. But not many men have seen a really kind boy or girl. In like manner, as kindness in the natural world implies age, in the spiritual world it implies grace. It does not belong to the fervour of beginnings, but to the solidity of progress. Indeed Christian kindness implies so much grace, that it almost assures the exercise of humility. A proud man is seldom a kind man. Humility makes us kind, and kindness makes us humble. It is one of the many instances, in the matter of the virtues, of good qualities being at once not only causes and effects together, but also their own causes and their own effects. It would be foolish to say that humility is an easy virtue. The very lowest degree of it is a difficult height to climb. But this much may be said for kindness, that it is the easiest road to humility, and infallible as well as easy : and is not humility just what we want, just what we are this moment coveting, just what will break down barriers, and give us free course on our way to God ?

Kindness does so much for us that it would be almost more easy to enumerate what it does not do, than to sum up what it does. It operates more energetically in some characters than in others. But it works wondrous changes in all. It is kindness which enables most men to put off the inseparable unpleasantness of youth. It watches the thoughts, controls the words, and helps us to unlearn early manhood's inveterate habit of criticism. It is astonishing how masterful it is in its influence over our dispositions, and yet how gentle, quiet, consistent, and successful. It makes us thoughtful and considerate. Detached acts of kindness may be the offspring of impulse. Yet he is mostly a good man,

whose impulses are good. But on the long run, habitual kindness is not a mere series of generous impulses, but the steadfast growth of generous deliberation. Much thought must go to consistent kindness, and much self-denying legislation. With most of us the very outward shape of our lives is, without fault of ours, out of harmony with persevering kindness. We have to humour circumstances. Our opportunities require management, and to be patient in waiting to do good to others is a fine work of grace. It is on account of all this that kindness makes us so attractive to others. It imparts a tinge of pathos to our characters, in which our asperities disappear, or at least only give a breadth of shadow to our hearts, which increases their beauty by making it more serious. We also become manly by being kind. Querulousness, which is the unattractive side of youthful piety, is no longer noticeable. It is alive, because an ailing or an isolated old age may bring it to the surface again. But kindness at any rate keeps it under water; for it is the high tide of the soul's nobility, and hides many an unseemly shallow which exposed its uninteresting sand in early days, and will disclose itself once more by ripples and stained water when age comes upon us, unless we are of those fortunate few whose hearts get younger as their heads grow older. A kind man is a man who is never self-occupied. He is genial; he is sympathetic; he is brave. How shall we express in one word these many things which kindness does for us who practice it? It prepares us with an especial preparation for the paths of disinterested love of God.

Now surely we cannot say that this subject of kindness is an unimportant one. It is in reality, as subsequent Conferences will show, a great part of the spiritual life. It is found in all its regions, and in all of them with different functions, and in none of them playing an inferior part. It

is also a peculiar participation of the spirit of Jesus, which is itself the life of all holiness. It reconciles worldly men to religious people ; and really, however contemptible worldly men are in themselves, they have souls to save, and it were much to be wished that devout persons would make their devotion a little less angular and aggressive to worldly people, provided they can do so without lowering practice or conceding principle. Devout people are, as a class, the least kind of all classes. This is a scandalous thing to say ; but the scandal of the fact is so much greater than the scandal of acknowledging it, that I will brave this last, for the sake of a greater good. Religious people are an unkindly lot. Poor human nature cannot do everything ; and kindness is too often left uncultivated, because men do not sufficiently understand its value. Men may be charitable, yet not kind ; merciful, yet not kind ; self-denying, yet not kind. If they would add a little common kindness to their uncommon graces, they would convert ten where they now only abate the prejudices of one. There is a sort of spiritual selfishness in devotion, which is rather to be regretted than condemned. I should not like to think it is unavoidable. Certainly its interfering with kindness is not unavoidable. It is only a little difficult, and calls for watchfulness. Kindness, as a grace, is certainly not sufficiently cultivated, while the self-gravitating, self-contemplating, self-inspecting parts of the spiritual life are cultivated too exclusively.

Rightly considered, kindness is the grand cause of God in the world. Where it is natural, it must forthwith be supernaturalised. Where it is not natural, it must be supernaturally planted. What is our life ? It is a mission to go into every corner it can reach, and reconquer for God's beatitude His unhappy world back to Him. It is a devotion of ourselves to the bliss of the Divine Life by the beautiful apostolate of kindness.

*KINDNESS.*

## II.

## KIND THOUGHTS.

EVERYWHERE in creation there is a charm, the fountain of which is invisible. In the natural, the moral, and the spiritual world it is the same. We are constantly referring it to causes, which are only its effects. Faith alone reveals to us its true origin. God is behind everything. His sweetness transpires through the thick shades which hide Him. It comes to the surface, and with gentle mastery overwhelms the whole world. The sweetness of the hidden God is the delight of life. It is the pleasantness of nature, and the consolation which is omnipresent in all suffering. We touch Him; we lean on Him; we feel Him; we see by Him; always and everywhere. Yet He makes Himself so natural to us, that we almost overlook Him. Indeed, if it were not for faith, we should overlook Him altogether. His presence is like light, when we do not see the face of the sun. It is like light on the stony folds of the mountain-top, coming through rents in the waving clouds, or in the close forest where the wind weaves and unweaves the canopy of foliage, or like the silver arrows of under-water light in the deep blue sea, with coloured stones and bright weeds glancing there. Still God does not shine equally through all things. Some things are more transparent, other things more opaque.

Some have a greater capacity for disclosing God than others. In the moral world, with which alone we are concerned at present, kind thoughts have a special power to let in upon us the light of the hidden God.

The thoughts of men are a world by themselves, vast and populous. Each man's thoughts are a world to himself. There is an astonishing breadth in the thoughts of even the most narrow-minded man. Thus we all of us have an interior world to govern, and he is the only real king who governs it effectually. There is no doubt that we are very much influenced by external things, and that our natural dispositions are in no slight degree dependent upon education. Nevertheless our character is formed within. It is manufactured in the world of our thoughts, and there we must go to influence it. He, who is master there, is master everywhere. He, whose energy covers his thoughts, covers the whole extent of self. He has himself completely under his own control, if he has learned to control his thoughts. The fountains of word and action have their untrodden springs in the caverns of the world of thought. He who can command the fountains is master of the city. The power of suffering is the grandest merchandise of life, and it also is manufactured in the world of thought. The union of grace and nature is the significance of our whole life. It is there, precisely in that union, that the secret of our vocation resides. The shape of our work and the character of our holiness are regulated from the point, different in different men, at which nature and grace are united. The knowledge of this point brings with it, not only the understanding of our past, but a sufficiently clear vision of our future; to say nothing of its being the broad sunshine of the present. But the union of nature and grace is for the most part effected in the world of thought.

But I will go even further than this, and will venture to



contradict a common opinion. It seems to me that our thoughts are a more true measure of ourselves than our actions are. They are not under the control of human respect. It is not easy for them to be ashamed of themselves. They have no witnesses but God. They are not bound to keep within certain limits or observe certain proprieties. Religious motives alone can claim jurisdiction over them. The struggle, which so often ensues within us before we can bring ourselves to do our duty, goes on entirely within our thoughts. It is our own secret, and men cannot put us to the blush because of it. The contradiction, which too often exists between our outward actions and our inward intentions, is only to be detected in the realm of our thoughts, whither none but God can penetrate, except by guesses, which are not the less offences against charity because they happen to be correct. In like manner, as an impulse will sometimes show more of our real character, than what we do after deliberation, our first thoughts will often reveal to us faults of disposition which outward restraints will hinder from issuing in action. Actions have their external hindrances, while our thoughts better disclose to us our possibilities of good and evil. Of course there is a most true sense in which the conscientious effort to cure a fault is a better indication of our character than the fault we have not yet succeeded in curing. Nevertheless we may die at any moment; and when we die, we die as we are. Thus our thoughts tell us, better than our actions can do, what we shall be like the moment after death. Lastly, it is in the world of thought that we most often meet with God, walking as in the shades of ancient Eden. It is there we hear His whispers. It is there we perceive the fragrance of His recent presence. It is thence that the first vibrations of grace proceed.

Now, if our thoughts be of this importance, and also if kindness be of the importance which was assigned to it in

the last Conference, it follows that kind thoughts must be of immense consequence. If a man habitually has kind thoughts of others, and that on supernatural motives, he is not far from being a saint. Such a man's thoughts are not kind intermittingly, or on impulse, or at haphazard. His first thoughts are kind, and he does not repent of them, although they often bring suffering and disgust in their train. All his thoughts are kind, and he does not chequer them with unkindly ones. Even when sudden passions or vehement excitements have thrown them into commotion, they settle down into a kindly humour, and cannot settle otherwise. These men are rare. Kind thoughts are rarer than either kind words or kind deeds. They imply a great deal of thinking about others. This in itself is rare. But they imply also a great deal of thinking about others without the thoughts being criticisms. This is rarer still. Active-minded men are naturally the most given to criticise; and they are also the men whose thoughts are generally the most exuberant. Such men therefore must make kind thoughts a defence against self. By sweetening the fountain of their thoughts, they will destroy the bitterness of their judgments.

But kind thoughts imply also a contact with God, and a divine ideal in our minds. Their origin cannot be anything short of divine. Like the love of beauty, they can spring, from no baser source. They are not dictated by self-interest nor stimulated by passion. They have nothing in them which is insidious, and they are almost always the preludes to some sacrifice of self. It must be from God's touch that such waters spring. They only live in the clammy mists of earth, because they breathe the fresh air of heaven. They are the scent with which the creature is penetrated through the indwelling of the Creator. They imply also the reverse of a superficial view of things. Nothing deepens the mind



so much as a habit of charity. Charity cannot feed on surfaces. Its instinct is always to go deeper. Roots are its natural food. A man's surfaces are always worse than his real depths. There may be exceptions to this rule; but I believe them to be very rare. Self is the only person who does not improve on acquaintance. Our deepest views of life are doubtless very shallow ones; for how little do we know of what God intends to do with His own world! We know something about His glory and our own salvation, but how the last becomes the first in the face of so much evil, neither theologian nor philosopher has ever been able adequately to explain. But so much we are warranted in saying, that charity is the deepest view of life, and nearest to God's view, and therefore also, not merely the truest view, but the only view which is true at all. Kind thoughts, then, are in the creature what His science is to the Creator. They embody the deepest, purest, grandest truth, to which we untruthful creatures can attain about others or ourselves.

Why are some men so forward to praise others? Is it not that it is their fashion of investing themselves with importance. But why are most men so reluctant to praise others? It is because they have such an inordinate opinion of themselves. Now kind thoughts for the most part imply a low opinion of self. They are an inward praise of others, and because inward, therefore genuine. No one, who has a high opinion of himself, finds his merits acknowledged according to his own estimate of them. His reputation therefore cannot take care of itself. He must push it; and a man who is pushing anything in the world is always unamiable, because he is obliged to stand so much on the defensive. A pugnacious man is far less disagreeable than a defensive man. Every man, who is habitually holding out for his rights, makes himself the equal of his inferiors, even if he be a king, and he must take the consequences, which

are far from pleasant. But the kind-thoughted man has no rights to defend, no self-importance to push. He thinks meanly of himself, and with so much honesty, that he thinks thus of himself with tranquillity. He finds others pleasanter to deal with than self; and others find him so pleasant to deal with, that love follows him wherever he goes, a love which is the more faithful to him because he makes so few pretences to be loved. Last of all, kind thoughts imply also supernatural principles; for inward kindness can be consistent on no others. Kindness is the occupation of our whole nature by the atmosphere and spirit of heaven. This is no inconsiderable affair. Nature cannot do the work itself, nor can it do it with ordinary succours. Were there ever any consistently kind heathens? If so they are in heaven now, for they must have been under the dominion of grace on earth. We must not confound kindness and mere good-humour. Good-humour is—no! on such an unkindly earth as this it will be better not to say a disparaging word even of mere good-humour. Would that there were more even of that in the world! I suspect angels cluster round a good-humoured man, as the gnats cluster round the trees they like.

But there is one class of kind thoughts which must be dwelt upon apart. I allude to kind interpretations. The habit of not judging others is one which it is very difficult to acquire, and which is generally not acquired till late on in the spiritual life. If men have ever indulged in judging others, the mere sight of an action almost indeliberately suggests an internal commentary upon it. It has become so natural to them to judge, however little their own duties or responsibilities are connected with what they are judging, that the actions of others present themselves to the mind as in the attitude of asking a verdict from it. All our fellow-men, who come within the reach of our knowledge, and for

the most retired of us the circle is a wide one, are prisoners at the bar; and if we are unjust, ignorant, and capricious judges, it must be granted to us that we are indefatigable ones. Now all this is simple ruin to our souls. At any risk, at the cost of life, there must be an end of this, or it will end in everlasting banishment from God. The standard of the last judgment is absolute. It is this—the measure which we have meted to others. Our present humour in judging others reveals to us what our sentence would be if we died now. Are we content to abide that issue? But, as it is impossible all at once to stop judging, and as it is also impossible to go on judging uncharitably, we must pass through the intermediate stage of kind interpretations. Few men have passed beyond this to a habit of perfect charity, which has blessedly stripped them of their judicial ermine and their deeply-rooted judicial habits of mind. We ought therefore to cultivate most sedulously the habit of kind interpretations.

Men's actions are very difficult to judge. Their real character depends in a great measure on the motives which prompt them, and those motives are invisible to us. Appearances are often against what we afterwards discover to have been deeds of virtue. Moreover, a line of conduct is, in its look at least, very little like a logical process. It is complicated with all manner of inconsistencies, and often deformed by what is in reality a hidden consistency. Nobody can judge men but God, and we can hardly obtain a higher or more reverent view of God than that which represents Him to us as judging men with perfect knowledge, unperplexed certainty, and undisturbed compassion. Now kind interpretations are imitations of the merciful ingenuity of the Creator finding excuses for His creatures. It is almost a day of revelation to us, when theology enables us to perceive that God is so merciful *precisely* because He is so wise; and from this truth

it is an easy inference, that kindness is our best wisdom, because it is an image of the wisdom of God. This is the idea of kind interpretations, and this is the use which we must make of them. The habit of judging is so nearly incurable, and its cure is such an almost interminable process, that we must concentrate ourselves for a long while on keeping it in check, and this check is to be found in kind interpretations. We must come to esteem very lightly our sharp eye for evil, on which perhaps we once prided ourselves as cleverness. It has been to us a fountain of sarcasm; and how seldom since Adam was created has a sarcasm fallen short of being a sin! We must look at our talent for analysis of character as a dreadful possibility of huge uncharitableness. We should have been much better without it from the first. It is the hardest talent of all to manage, because it is so difficult to make any glory for God out of it. We are sure to continue to say clever things, so long as we continue to indulge in this analysis; and clever things are equally sure to be sharp and acid. Sight is a great blessing, but there are times and places in which it is far more blessed not to see. It would be comparatively easy for us to be holy, if only we could always see the characters of our neighbours either in soft shade or with the kindly deceits of moonlight upon them. Of course we are not to grow blind to evil; for thus we should speedily become unreal. But we must grow to something higher, and something truer, than a quickness in detecting evil.

We must rise to something truer. Yes! Have we not always found in our past experience that on the whole our kind interpretations were truer than our harsh ones? What mistakes have we not made in judging others! But have they not almost always been on the side of harshness? Every day some phenomenon of this kind occurs. We have seen a thing as clear as day. It could have but one meaning.

We have already taken measures. We have roused our righteous indignation. All at once the whole matter is differently explained, and that in some most simple way, so simple that we are lost in astonishment that we should never have thought of it ourselves. Always distrust very plain cases, says a legal writer. Things that were dark begin to give light. What seemed opaque is perceived to be transparent. Things that everybody differed about, as people in planting a tree can never agree what it wants to make it straight, now everybody sees in the same light; so natural and obvious has the explanation been. Nay, things that it appeared impossible to explain are just those the explanations of which are the most simple. How many times in life have we been wrong when we put a kind construction on the conduct of others? We shall not need our fingers to count those mistakes upon. Moreover grace is really much more common than our querulousness is generally willing to allow. We may suspect its operations in the worst men we meet with. Thus, without any forced impossibility, we may call in supernatural considerations in order to make our criticisms more ingenious in their charity. When we grow a little holier, we shall summon also to our aid those supernatural motives in ourselves, which, by depressing our own ideas of ourselves, elevate our generous belief in others.

But, while common sense convinces us of the truth of kind interpretations, common selfishness ought to open our eyes to their wisdom and their policy. We must have passed through life unobservantly, if we have never perceived that a man is very much himself what he thinks of others. Of course his own faults may be the cause of his unfavourable judgments of others; but they are also, and in a very marked way, effects of those same judgments. A man, who was on a higher eminence before, will soon by harsh judgments of others sink to the level of his own



judgments. When you hear a man attribute meanness to another, you may be sure, not only that the critic is an ill-natured man, but that he has got a similar element of meanness in himself, or is fast sinking to it. A man is always capable himself of a sin which he thinks another is capable of, or which he himself is capable of imputing to another. Even a well-founded suspicion more or less degrades a man. His suspicion may be verified, and he may escape some material harm by having cherished the suspicion. But he is unavoidably the worse man in consequence of having entertained it. This is a very serious consideration, and rather a frightening argument in favour of charitable interpretations. Furthermore, our hidden judgments of others are, almost with a show of special and miraculous interference, visited upon ourselves. Virtue grows in us under the influence of kindly judgments, as if they were its nutriment. But in the case of harsh judgments we find we often fall into the sin of which we have judged another guilty, although it is not perhaps a sin at all common to ourselves. Or, if matters do not go so far as this, we find ourselves suddenly overwhelmed with a tempest of unusual temptations; and on reflection conscience is ready to remind us that the sin, to which we are thus violently and unexpectedly tempted, is one which we have of late been uncharitably attributing to others. Sometimes also we are ourselves falsely accused, and widely believed to be guilty of some fault of which we are quite innocent; but it is a fault of which we have recently, in our own minds at least, accused another. Moreover the truth or falsehood of our judgments seem to have very little to do with the matter. The truth of them does not protect us from their unpleasant consequences; just as the truth of a libel is no sufficient defence of it. It is the uncharitableness of the judgment, or the judging at all, to which this self-revenging power is fastened. It works itself out like a

law, quietly but infallibly. Is not all this matter for very serious reflection?

But, in conclusion, what does all this doctrine of kind interpretations amount to? To nothing less, in the case of most of us, than living a new life in a new world. We may imagine life in another planet, with whose physical laws we may happen to have a sufficient acquaintance. But it would hardly differ more in a physical way from our earthly life, than our moral life would differ from what it is at present, if we were habitually to put a kind interpretation on all we saw and heard, and habitually had kind thoughts of every one of whom we thought at all. It would not merely put a new face on life; it would put a new depth to it. We should come as near as possible to becoming another kind of creatures. Look what an amount of bitterness we have about us! What is to become of it? It plainly cannot be taken into heaven. Where must it be left behind? We clearly cannot put it off by the mere act of dying, as we can put off thereby a rheumatic limb, or wasted lungs, or diseased blood. It will surely be a long and painful process in the heats of purgatory; but we may be happy if mercy so abound upon us, that the weight of our bitterness shall not sink us deeper into the fire, into that depth from which no one ever rises to the surface more. But when we reach heaven, in what state shall we be? Certainly one very important feature of it will be the absence of all bitterness and criticism, and the way in which our expanded minds will be possessed with thoughts of the most tender and overflowing kindness. Thus by cultivating kind thoughts we are in a very special way rehearsing for heaven. But more than this: we are effectually earning heaven. For by God's grace we are imitating in our own minds that which in the Divine Mind we rest all our hopes on,—merciful allowances, ingeniously favourable interpretations, thoughts of unmingled

kindness, and all the inventions and tolerations of a supreme compassion.

The practice of kind thoughts also tells most decisively on our spiritual life. It leads to great self-denial about our talents and influence. Criticism is an element in our reputation and an item in our influence. We partly attract persons to us by it. We partly push principles by means of it. The practice of kind thoughts commits us to the surrender of all this. It makes us, again and again in life, sacrifice successes at the moment they are within reach. Our conduct becomes a perpetual voluntary forfeiture of little triumphs, the necessary result of which is a very hidden life. He, who has ever struggled with a proud heart and a bitter temper, will perceive at once what innumerable and vast processes of spiritual combat all this implies. But it brings its reward also. It endows us with a marvellous facility in spiritual things. It opens and smooths the paths of prayer. It sheds a clear still light over our self-knowledge. It adds a peculiar delight to the exercise of faith. It enables us to find God easily. It is a fountain of joy in our souls, which rarely intermits its flowing, and then only for a little while and for a greater good. Above all things, the practice of kind thoughts is our main help to that complete government of the tongue, which we all so much covet, and without which the apostle says that all our religion is vain. The interior beauty of a soul through habitual kindliness of thought is greater than our words can tell. To such a man life is a perpetual bright evening, with all things calm, and fragrant, and restful. The dust of life is laid, and its fever cool. All sounds are softer, as is the way of evening, and all sights are fairer, and the golden light makes our enjoyment of earth a happily pensive preparation for heaven.



## KINDNESS.

### III.

#### KIND WORDS.

FROM thoughts we naturally pass to words. Kind words are the music of the world. They have a power which seems to be beyond natural causes, as if they were some angel's song, which had lost its way, and come on earth, and sang on undyingly, smiting the hearts of men with sweetest wounds, and putting for the while an angel's nature into us.

Let us then think, first of all, of the power of kind words. In truth there is hardly a power on earth equal to them. It seems as if they could almost do what in reality God alone can do, namely, soften the hard and angry hearts of men. Many a friendship, long, loyal, and self-sacrificing, rested at first on no thicker a foundation than a kind word. The two men were not likely to be friends. Perhaps each of them regarded the other's antecedents with somewhat of distrust. They had possibly been set against each other by the circulation of gossip. Or they had been looked upon as rivals, and the success of one was regarded as incompatible with the success of the other. But a kind word, perhaps a mere report of a kind word, has been enough to set all things straight, and to be the commencement of an enduring friendship. The power of kind words is shown also in the de

struction of prejudices, however inveterate they may have been. Surely we must all of us have experienced this ourselves. For a long time we have had prejudices against a person. They seem to us extremely well founded. We have a complete view of the whole case in our own minds. Some particular circumstances bring us into connection with this man. We see nothing to disabuse us of our prejudices. There is not an approach to any kind of proof, however indirect, that we were either mistaken in forming such a judgment, or that we have exaggerated the matter. But kind words pass, and the prejudices thaw away. Right or wrong, there was some reason, or show of reason, for forming them, while there is neither reason, nor show of reason, for their departure. There is no logic in the matter, but a power which is above logic, the simple unassisted power of a few kind words. What has been said of prejudices applies equally to quarrels. Kind words will set right things which have got most intricately wrong. In reality an unforgiving heart is a rare monster. Most men get tired of the justest quarrels. Even those quarrels, where the quarrel has been all on one side, and which are always the hardest to set right, give way in time to kind words. At first they will be unfairly taken as admissions that we have been in the wrong; then they will be put down to deceit and flattery; then they will irritate by the discomfort of conscience which they will produce in the other; but finally they will succeed in healing the wound that has been so often and so obstinately torn open. All quarrels probably rest on misunderstanding, and only live by silence, which as it were stereotypes the misunderstanding. A misunderstanding, which is more than a month old, may generally be regarded as incapable of explanation. Renewed explanations become renewed misunderstandings. Kind words, patiently uttered for long together, and without visible fruit, are our

only hope. They will succeed. They will not explain what has been misunderstood, but they will do what is much better—make explanation unnecessary, and so avoid the risk, which always accompanies explanations, of reopening old sores.

In all the foregoing instances the power of kind words is remedial. But it can be productive also. Kind words produce happiness. How often have we ourselves been made happy by kind words, in a manner and to an extent, which we are quite unable to explain! No analysis enables us to detect the secret of the power of kind words. Even self-love is found inadequate as a cause. Now, as I have said before, happiness is a great power of holiness. Thus, kind words, by their power of producing happiness, have also a power of producing holiness, and so of winning men to God. I have already touched on this, when I spoke of kindness in general. But it must now be added, that words have a power of their own both for good and evil, which I believe to be more influential and energetic over our fellowmen than even actions. If I may use such a word when I am speaking of religious subjects, it is by voice and words that men mesmerise each other. Hence it is that the world is converted by the foolishness of preaching. Hence it is that an angry word rankles longer in the heart than an angry gesture, nay, very often even longer than a blow. Thus all that has been said of the power of kindness in general applies with an additional and peculiar force to kind words. They prepare men for conversion. They convert them. They sanctify them. They procure entrance for wholesome counsels into their souls. They blunt temptations. They dissolve the dangerous clouds of gloom and sadness. They are beforehand with evil. They exorcise the devil. Sometimes the conversions they work are gradual and take time. But more often they are sudden, more often they are like instantaneous

revelations from heaven, not only unravelling complicated misunderstandings and softening the hardened convictions of years, but giving a divine vocation to the soul. Truly it would be worth going through fire and water to acquire the right and to find the opportunity of saying kind words !

Surely then it gives life quite a peculiar character that it should be gifted with a power so great, even if the exercise of it were difficult and rare. But the facility of this power is a fresh wonder about it, in addition to its greatness. It involves very little self-sacrifice, and for the most part none at all. It can be exercised generally without much effort, with no more effort than the water makes in flowing from the spring. Moreover, the occasions for it do not lie scattered over life at great distances from each other. They occur continually. They come daily. They are frequent in the day. All these are commonplaces. But really it would seem as if very few of us give this power of kind words the consideration which is due to it. So great a power, such a facility in the exercise of it, such a frequency of opportunities for the application of it, and yet the world still what it is, and we still what we are ! It seems incredible. I can only compare it to the innumerable sacraments which inundate our souls with grace, and the inexplicably little modicum of holiness which is the total result of them all, or, again, to the immense amount of knowledge of God which there is in the world, and yet the little worship He receives. Kind words cost us nothing, yet how often do we grudge them ! On the few occasions, when they do imply some degree of self-sacrifice, they almost instantly repay us a hundred fold. The opportunities are frequent, but we show no eagerness either in looking out for them, or in embracing them. What inference are we to draw from all this ? Surely this, —that it is next to impossible to be habitually kind, except by the help of divine grace and upon supernatural motives.

Take life all through, its adversity as well as its prosperity, its sickness as well as its health, its loss of its rights as well as its enjoyment of them, and we shall find that no natural sweetness of temper, much less any acquired philosophical equanimity, is equal to the support of a uniform habit of kindness. Nevertheless, with the help of grace, the habit of saying kind words is very quickly formed, and when once formed, it is not speedily lost. I have often thought that unkindness is very much a mental habit, almost as much mental as moral; observation has confirmed me in this idea, because I have met so many men with unkind heads, and have been fortunate enough never to my knowledge to have come across an unkind heart. I believe cruelty to be less uncommon than real inward unkindness.

Self-interest makes it comparatively easy for us to do that which we are well paid for doing. The great price, which every one puts on a little kind word, makes the practice of saying them still easier. They become more easy, the more on the one hand that we know ourselves, and on the other that we are united to God. Yet what are these but the two contemporaneous operations of grace, in which the life of holiness consists? Kindness, to be perfect, to be lasting, must be a conscious imitation of God. Sharpness, bitterness, sarcasm, acute observation, divination of motives,—all these things disappear when a man is earnestly conforming himself to the image of Christ Jesus. The very attempt to be like our dearest Lord is already a well-spring of sweetness within us, flowing with an easy grace over all who come within our reach. It is true that a special sort of unkindness is one of the uglinesses of pious beginnings. But this arises from an inability to manage our fresh grace properly. Our old bitterness gets the impulse meant for our new sweetness, and the machine cannot be got right in a moment. He who is not patient with converts to God, will forfeit

many of his own graces before he is aware. Not only is kindness due to every one, but a special kindness is due to every one. Kindness is not kindness unless it be special. It is in its fitness, seasonableness, and individual application that its charm consists.

It is natural to pass from the facility of kind words to their reward. I find myself always talking about happiness, while I am treating of kindness. The fact is, the two things go together. The double reward of kind words is in the happiness they cause in others, and the happiness they cause in ourselves. The very process of uttering them is a happiness in itself. Even the imagining of them fills our minds with sweetness, and makes our hearts glow pleasantly. Is there any happiness in the world like the happiness of a disposition made happy by the happiness of others? There is no joy to be compared with it. The luxuries which wealth can buy, the rewards which ambition can attain, the pleasures of art and scenery, the abounding sense of health, and the exquisite enjoyment of mental creations, are nothing to this pure and heavenly happiness, where self is drowned in the blessedness of others. Yet this happiness follows close upon kind words, and is their legitimate result. But, independently of this, kind words make us happy in ourselves. They soothe our own irritation. They charm our cares away. They draw us nearer to God. They raise the temperature of our love. They produce in us a sense of quiet restfulness, like that which accompanies the consciousness of forgiven sin. They shed abroad the peace of God within our hearts. This is their second reward. Then, moreover, we become kinder by saying kind words, and this is in itself a third reward. They help us also to attain the grace of purity, which is another excellent reward. They win us many other graces from God; but one especially:—they appear to have a peculiar congeniality with the grace of contrition,



which is softheartedness towards God. Everything, which makes us gentle, has at the same time a tendency to make us contrite. A natural melting of the heart has often been the beginning of an acceptable repentance. Hence it is that seasons of sorrow are apt to be seasons of grace. This, too, is a huge reward. Then, last of all, kind words make us truthful. O this is what we want,—to be true! It is our insincerity, our manifold inseparable falseness, which is the load under which we groan. There is no slavery but untruthfulness. How have years passed in fighting, and still we are so untrue! It clings to us; for it is the proper stain of creatures. We fight on wearily. Kind words come and ally themselves to us, and we make way. They make us true, because kindness is, so far as we know, the most probable truth in the world. They make us true, because what is untruthful is not kind. They make us true, because kindness is God's view, and His view is always the true view.

Why then are we ever anything else but kind in our words? There are some difficulties. This must be honestly admitted. In some respects a clever man is more likely to be kind than a man who is not clever, because his mind is wider, and takes in a broader range, and is more capable of looking at things from different points of view. But there are other respects in which it is harder for a clever man to be kind, especially in his words. He has a temptation, and it is one of those temptations which appear sometimes to border on the irresistible, to say clever things; and somehow clever things are hardly ever kind things. There is a drop either of acid or of bitter in them, and it seems as if that drop was exactly what genius had insinuated. I believe, if we were to make an honest resolution never to say a clever thing, we should advance much more rapidly on the road to heaven. Our Lord's words in the Gospels should be our

models. If we may reverently say it, when we consider of what a sententious and proverbial character His words were, it is remarkable how little of epigram, or sharpness, there is in them. Of course the words of the Eternal Word are all of them heavenly mysteries, each one with the light and seal of His Divinity upon it. At the same time they are also examples to us. On the whole, to say clever things of others is hardly ever without sin. There is something in genius which is analogous to a sting. Its sharpness, its speed, its delicacy, its wantonness, its pain, and its poison, —genius has all these things as well as the sting. There are some men who make it a kind of social profession to be amusing talkers. One is sometimes overwhelmed with melancholy by their professional efforts to be entertaining. They are the bugbears of real conversation. But the thing to notice about them here is, that they can hardly ever be religious men. A man, who lays himself out to amuse, is never a safe man to have for a friend, or even for an acquaintance. He is not a man whom any one really loves or respects. He is never innocent. He is for ever jostling charity by the pungency of his criticisms, and wounding justice by his revelation of secrets. *Il n'est pas ordinaire*, says La Bruyère, *que celui qui fait rire se fasse estimer*.

There is also a grace of kind listening, as well as a grace of kind speaking. Some men listen with an abstracted air, which shows that their thoughts are elsewhere. Or they seem to listen, but by wide answers and irrelevant questions show that they have been occupied with their own thoughts, as being more interesting, at least in their own estimation, than what you have been saying. Some listen with a kind of importunate ferocity, which makes you feel that you are being put upon your trial, and that your auditor expects beforehand that you are going to tell him a lie, or to be inaccurate, or to say something which he will disapprove,



and that you must mind your expressions. Some interrupt, and will not hear you to the end. Some hear you to the end, and then forthwith begin to talk to you about a similar experience which has befallen themselves, making your case only an illustration of their own. Some, meaning to be kind, listen with such a determined, lively, violent attention, that you are at once made uncomfortable, and the charm of conversation is at an end. Many persons, whose manners will stand the test of speaking, break down under the trial of listening. But all these things should be brought under the sweet influences of religion. Kind listening is often an act of the most delicate interior mortification, and is a great assistance towards kind speaking. Those who govern others must take care to be kind listeners, or else they will soon offend God, and fall into secret sins.

We may, then, put down clever speeches as the first and greatest difficulty in the way of kind words. A second difficulty is that of repressing vexation at certain times and in certain places. Each man meets with peculiar characters who have a speciality, often quite inexplicable, of irritating him. They always come at the wrong time, say the most inopportune things, and make the most unfortunate choice of topics of conversation. Their presence has always something intrusive about it. You may admire, respect, even like the persons; yet you give out sparks when they touch you, and explode if they rub against you. This is only one example of many species of vexation, which it is difficult to repress in our social intercourse, and which it is the office of the spirit of kindness to allay.

The unselfishness of speedily and gracefully distracting ourselves from self is also singularly difficult to practise. A man comes to us with an imaginary sorrow when we are bowed to the earth with a real one. Or he speaks to us with the loud voice and metallic laugh of robust health,

when our nerves are all shrinking up with pain, and our whole being quivering, like a mimosa, with excruciating sensitiveness. Or he comes to pour out the exuberance of his happiness into our hearts which are full of gloom, and his brightness is a reproach, sometimes almost a menace, to our unhappiness. Or we are completely possessed with some responsibility, harassed by some pecuniary difficulty, or haunted by some tyrannical presentiment of evil, and yet we are called upon to throw ourselves into some ridiculous little embarrassment, some almost fictitious wrong, or some shadow of a suffering, for which another claims our sympathy. Here is a grand material for sanctification. Nevertheless, such materials are hard to work up in practice. It is weary work cleaning old bricks to build a new house with.

These are difficulties ; but we have got to reach heaven, and must push on. The more humble we are, the more kindly we shall talk ; the more kindly we talk, the more humble we shall grow. An air of superiority is foreign to the genius of kindness. The look of kindness is that of one receiving a favour rather than conferring it. Indeed it is the case with all the virtues, that kindness is a road to them. Kind words will help us to them. Thus out of the difficulties of kind speaking will come the grand and more than sufficient reward of kind speaking,—a sanctification higher, completer, swifter, easier, than any other sanctification.

Weak and full of wants as we are ourselves, we must make up our minds, or rather take heart, to do some little good to this poor world while we are in it. Kind words are our chief implements for this work. A kind-worded man is a genial man ; and geniality is power. Nothing sets wrong right so soon as geniality. There are a thousand things to be reformed, and no reformation succeeds unless it be genial. No one was ever corrected by a sarcasm ; crushed

perhaps, if the sarcasm was clever enough,—but drawn nearer to God, never. Men want to advocate changes, it may be in politics, or in science, or in philosophy, or in literature, or perhaps in the working of the Church. They give lectures, they write books, they start reviews, they found schools to propagate their views, they coalesce in associations, they collect money, they move reforms in public meetings, and all to further their peculiar ideas. They are unsuccessful. From being unsuccessful themselves they become unsympathetic with others. From this comes narrowness of mind. Their very talents are deteriorated. The next step is to be snappish, then bitter, then eccentric, then rude. After that, they abuse people for not taking their advice; and last of all, their impotence, like that of all angry prophets, ends in the shrillness of a scream. Why they scream is not so obvious. Perhaps for their own relief. It is the phrenzy of the disregarded sibyl. All this comes of their not being genial. Without geniality no solid reform was ever made yet. But if there are a thousand things to reform in the world, there are tens of thousands of people to convert. Satire will not convert men. Hell threatened very kindly is more persuasive than a biting truth about a man's false position. The fact is, geniality is the best controversy. The genial man is the only successful man. Nothing can be done for God without geniality. More plans fail for the want of that than for the want of anything else. A genial man is both an apostle and an evangelist; an apostle, because he brings men to Christ; an evangelist, because he portrays Christ to men.

## KINDNESS.

## IV.

## KIND ACTIONS.

THERE is always one bright thought in our minds, when all the rest are dark. There is one thought out of which a moderately cheerful man can always make some satisfactory sunshine, if not a sufficiency of it. It is the thought of the bright populous heaven. There is joy there at least, if there is joy nowhere else. There is true service of God there, however poor and interested the love of Him may be on earth. Multitudes are abounding in the golden light there, even if they that rejoice on earth be few. At this hour it is all going on, so near us that we cannot be hopelessly unhappy with so much happiness so near. Yet its nearness makes us wistful. Then let us think that there are multitudes in heaven to-day, who are there because of kind actions; many are there for doing them, many for having had them done to them.

We cannot do justice to the subject of kindness, if we conclude without saying something about kind actions and kind sufferings. So let us think, first of all, how much we ourselves in past life owe to kind actions. If we look back through the last twenty or thirty years, it is amazing to consider the number of kind actions which have been done to us. They are almost beyond our counting. Indeed we

feel that those we remember are hardly so numerous as those we have forgotten; forgotten, not through ingratitude, but because of the distractions of life and the shortness of our memory. Under what various circumstances too they have been done to us! They have come to us together with blame, as well as been the accompaniments of praise. They have made our darkness light, and our light brighter. They have made us smile in the midst of our tears, and have made us shed tears of joy when we were laughing carelessly. They have come to us also from all quarters. They have reached us from persons in whom we might have expected to meet with them. They have reached us from unexpected persons, who would naturally have been indifferent to us. They have reached us from those from whom we had every reason to expect the opposite. They have come to us from such un hoped-for quarters, and under such an affecting variety of circumstances, that each one of us must seem to himself to have exhausted the possibilities of kindness. The thought of them all melts our hearts.

Now every one of these acts of kindness has doubtless done us a certain amount of spiritual good. If they did not make us better at the time, they prepared the way for our becoming better, or they sowed a seed of future goodness, and made an impression which we never suspected, and yet which was ineffaceable. Graces from God, kindnesses from men—we seem to have stood all our lives under the constant dripping of these beneficent showers. But who can say if there were two showers, and if it was not all the while but one, kindness being nothing more than a peculiar form of grace? There is no great harm in confounding the two; but, to be strict, grace is one thing, and kindness is another. Let us content ourselves then with saying, that kindness has again and again done the preliminary work for grace in our souls. Let us think also how little we have deserved

all these kind actions, not only so far as God is concerned, but so far as our fellow-creatures are concerned also. There is no one who has not received tenfold more kindness himself than he has shown to others. The thought of all the kindness of so many persons to us sometimes grows to be almost intolerable, because of the sense of our own unkindness. These kind actions have been to us like importunate angels. They have surrounded us almost against our own will, and done us all manner of unasked good, of extra good, of good apparently unconnected with themselves. From how many evils have they not also rescued us? We know of many; but there are many more of which we do not know. But in this respect, as well as in others, they have done angels' work in our behalf. To how much good have they encouraged us? We know of much; but there is much more of which we do not know. We can hardly tell what we should have been, had we been treated one whit less kindly than we have been. Have we not sometimes been on the verge of doing something which a life would have been short to repent of? Have not words been on our tongues, which, had we said them, we would willingly have lost a limb afterwards to have unsaid? Have we not vacillated in the face of decisions, which we now perceive concerned eternity as well as time? Can we not now see in the retrospect steep places, down which we were beginning to fall, and a kind act saved us, and at the time we thought we had stumbled over a stone by the way? We are indeed very far from what we ought to be now. But it is frightening to think what we should have been, had parents, friends, nurses, masters, servants, schoolfellows, enemies, been less kind than they have been. All through life kindness has been bridling the devil that was in us. The surprised and affectionate recollection of it now is one of our greatest powers for virtue, and may easily be made a fountain of interior



sweetness within ourselves. Feeling that we ourselves owe all this to the kindness of others, are we not bound, as far as lies in our power, to be putting every one else on all sides of us under similarly blessed obligations?

It is not hard to do this. The occasions for kind actions are manifold. No one passes a day without meeting with these fortunate opportunities. They grow round us even while we lie on a bed of sickness, and the helpless are rich in a power of kindness towards the helpful. Yet, as is always the rule with kindness, the frequency of its opportunities is rivalled by the facility of its execution. Hardly out of twenty kind actions does one call for anything like an effort of self-denial on our part. Easiness is the rule, and difficulty the exception. When kindness does call for an effort, how noble and self-rewarding is the sacrifice! We always gain more than we lose. We gain even outwardly, and often even in kind. But the inward gain is invariable. Nothing forfeits that. Moreover there is something very economical about the generosity of kindness. A little goes a long way. It seems to be an almost universal fallacy among mankind, which leads them to put a higher price on kindness than it deserves. Neither do men look generally at what we have had to give up in order to do for them what we have done. They only look to the kindness. The manner is more to them than the matter. The sacrifice adds something, but only a small proportion of the whole. The very world, unkindly as it is, looks at kindness through a glass which multiplies as well as magnifies. I called this a fallacy. It is a sweet fallacy; and reminds us of that apparent fallacy which leads God to put such a price upon the pusillanimities of our love. This fallacy, however, confers upon kind actions a real power. The amount of kindness bears no proportion to the effect of kindness. The least kind action is taller than the hugest wrong. The weakest

kindness can lift a heavy weight. It reaches far, and it travels swiftly. Every kind action belongs to many persons, and lays many persons under obligations. We appropriate to ourselves kind actions done to those we love, and we forthwith proceed to love the doers of them. Nobody is kind only to one person at once, but to many persons in one. What a beautiful entanglement of charity we get ourselves into by doing kind things! What possesses us that we do not do them oftener?

Neither is a kind action shortlived. The doing of it is only the beginning of it; it is hardly the thing itself. Years of estrangement can hardly take the odour out of a kind action. Hatred truly has chemistry of its own, by which it can turn kind actions into its choicest food. But, after all, hatred is an uncommon thing, as well as a brutal one; that is to say, comparatively uncommon. Whereas it is not an uncommon thing for a man at the end of half a century to do a kind action because one was done to him fifty years ago. There is also this peculiarity about kind actions, that the more we try to repay them the further off we seem from having repaid them. The obligation lengthens, and widens, and deepens. We hasten to fill up the chasm by our gratitude; but we only deepen it, as if we were digging a well or sinking a pit. We go faster still. The abyss grows more hungry. At last our lives become delightfully committed to be nothing but a profusion of kind actions, and we fly heavenwards on the wings of the wind. There is a pathetic sweetness about gratitude, which I suppose arises from this. It is a pathos which is very humbling, but very invigorating also. What was the feeling which was father in the poet's mind to those exquisite verses?

“ I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds  
With coldness still returning ;



Alas ! the gratitude of men  
Hath oftener left me mourning !”

But by this time an objection to the whole matter will have come plainly into view. Indeed to some it has already presented itself before now. I have been aware of it throughout, but have chosen to defer noticing it till now. It may be said that all this implies a very unsupernatural view of the spiritual life, and lays undue stress on what are almost natural virtues, that it refers more to outward conduct than to inward experiences, that there is too much of common sense in it and too little of mystical theology. I might content myself with replying that a man cannot write on more than one subject at once, neither can he bring in the whole of ascetical doctrine, when he is illustrating but one portion of it. But there is something more in the objection, which I can only answer by pleading guilty to the charge, and refusing to be ashamed of my guilt. When we read the lives of the saints, or ponder on the teaching of mystical books, we shall surely have no difficulty in admitting that we ourselves are but beginners, or at least men of very low attainments, in the matter of perfection. As such we are liable to two mistakes ; I hardly know whether to call them temptations or delusions. The first is to think too little of external things. Do not misunderstand me. I am not accusing you of paying too much attention to the cultivation of an interior spirit. It is not easy to do this. In our state perhaps it is impossible. But what I mean is, that beginners like to turn their eye away from outward conduct to the more hidden processes of their own spiritual experiences. If we allow a beginner to choose his own subject for particular examen of conscience, he will generally choose some very delicate and imperceptible fault, the theatre of which is almost wholly within, or some refined form of self-love whose metamorphoses are exceedingly difficult either to detect or

to control. He will not choose his temper, or his tongue, or his love of nice dishes, or some unworthy habit which is disagreeable to those around him. Yet this is the rule of St. Ignatius; and surely no one will accuse him of not cultivating an interior spirit. This then is the first of the two mistakes which I attributed to men of low attainments. They affect those parts of the spiritual life, which lie on the borders of mystical theology, and do justice neither to the common things of the faith, nor to the regulation of outward conduct. This leads to hardness of heart, to spiritual pride, and to self-righteousness. It has a peculiar power to neutralise the operations of grace, and to reduce our spirituality to a matter of words and feelings. A man will remain unimproved for years who travels upon this path.

The second mistake is very like the first, though there is a difference in it. It consists in giving way to an attraction towards what is too high for us. It is not that we divide things into outward and inward, and exaggerate the latter. But we divide them into high and commonplace, and are inclined almost to despise the latter. We fasten with a sort of diseased eagerness upon the exceptional practices of the saints. Peculiarities have a kind of charm for us. We try to force ourselves to thirst for suffering, when we have hardly grace enough for the quiet endurance of a headache. We ask leave to pray for calumny, when a jocosé retort puts us into a passion. We turn from the Four Last Things as subjects of prayer hardly suited to our state of disinterested love. We skip like antelopes over the purgative way, as if none but the herbage of the illuminative, or the desert flowers of the unitive way, were food delicate enough for us. We enjoy Father Baker while we think Rodriguez dry. In a word, we traffic with exceptions rather than with rules. Hence the common moral virtues, the ordinary motives of religion, the duties of our state of life, our responsibilities

toward others, the usual teaching of sermons and spiritual books, are all kept in the background. We are too well instructed to speak evil of them, or to show them contempt; but we treat them with a respectful neglect. Thus our spiritual life becomes a sort of elegant selfish solitude, a temple reared to dainty delusions, a mere fastidious and exclusive worship of self whose refinement is only an aggravation of its dishonesty. No saint ever went along this road. We can only reach the delicate truths of mysticism through the commonplace sincerities of asceticism. We are never so likely to be high in the spiritual life, as when we seem just like anybody else. The grace to be indistinguishable from the good people round us, is a greater grace than that which visibly marks us off from their practices or their attainments.

Now I believe that both these mistakes find an utterance in the objection which I have noticed, and therefore, as being peculiarly out of sympathy with both these errors, I willingly plead guilty to the objection. I do think we are all in danger of making away with the supernatural by having first used it to destroy the natural. I could go on for hours, illustrating this mischievous tendency; but I must keep to my subject, and endeavour to show those, who feel they cannot throw off the objection so lightly as I do, what a very real connection there is between this practice of kindness on supernatural motives, and the highest departments of the spiritual life. Indeed it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of kindness as an ally in our invisible warfare. Naturalists say of the ant, that the most surprising part of its instinct is its genius for extemporaneousness. In other words, it almost puts reason to shame, by the promptitude with which it acts under totally new circumstances, its inventiveness in meeting with difficulties of which it can have had no previous experience, its ingenuity

in changing the use of its tools, its power of instantaneous divination as to how it shall act in unexpected conjunctures, and its foreseeing judgment in hardly ever having to make an experiment, or to try two ways of doing a thing. Now there is something very like this in kindness. Spiritual persons, who specially cultivate kindness, are singularly exempt from delusions. Yet delusions form the most intricate and baffling part of our spiritual warfare. But the instinct of kindness is never baffled. No position ever seems new to it, no difficulty unforeseen. It appears to be dispensed from the necessity of deliberating. It follows the lightning-like changes of self-love, or of the temper, with a speed as lightning-like as their own. It sees through all stratagems. It is for ever extemporising new methods of defence, and new varieties of attack. It always has light enough to work by, because it is luminous itself.

Besides this, kindness has an intrinsic congeniality with all the characteristics of the higher spiritual states. Kind actions go upon unselfish motives, and therefore tend to form a habit of disinterestedness in us, which prepares us for the highest motives of divine love. They also catch us up, like strong angels, into the regions of sacrifice. Like God's goodness, they are constantly occupied where there is no hope of repayment and return. Like the shedding of the Precious Blood, they have an actual preference for multiplying themselves upon their enemies. In like manner as God acts evermore for His own glory, so kind actions, when they are habitual, must very frequently be done for Him alone. It is their instinct to be hidden, like the instinct of His providence. Nay, God often rewards them by arranging that they shall be unrequited, and so look only to Him as Himself their recompense; and He shows frequently a most tender wisdom in arranging that all this shall be without the sin or ingratitude of others. He even shrouds

our kind actions for us by letting us look stern, or speak sharply, or be quick-tempered, in the doing of them. I need not stop to develop all this. Who does not see that we are here right in the midst of the motive-machinery of the very highest spiritual condition of the soul?

It may not be out of place, however, to lay down a few plain rules for the doing of kind actions. I have said that the majority of them require no effort; but when they have to be done with effort, it is unkind not to keep the effort out of view. At the same time, so that our humility may not be disquieted, we must bear in mind that the being done with effort is no just cause of disheartenment. We should never repeat to others our kind actions. If we do, their heavenly influence over ourselves goes at once. Neither does it simply evaporate; it remains as a dead weight. The soul has many heaps of rubbish in it, but none more deleterious than this. When persons begin to thank us, we should playfully stop their thanks, but not stiffly or unreally. There are some men, who would feel awkward and uncomfortable if they were not allowed to pour out their feelings. Such men we must not check. It is part of the discernment of good manners to find out who they are, and the perfection of good manners to be natural and simple under the operation of being praised. Being praised puts us for the most part in a ludicrous position. Either it mortifies us by a sense of inferiority, or it makes us suspicious by a feeling of disproportion, or it unseasonably awakes our sense of humour, which is always in proportion to the honest seriousness of those who are praising us. The fact is, very few people know how to praise, and fewer still know how to take it. We should never dwell upon our kind actions in our own minds. God is in them. They have been operations of grace. He is shy of being looked at, and withdraws. When we are tempted to be

complacent about them, let us think of the sanctity of God, and be ashamed. Let us dwell on His attribute of magnificence, and be especially devout to it. We shall thus keep ourselves within the limits of our own littleness, and even feel comfortable in them.

Before we conclude our task, we must say something about kind suffering. Kind suffering is in fact a form of kind action, with peculiar rubrics of its own. But if all kindness needs grace, kind suffering needs it a hundred fold. Of a truth those are rare natures, which know how to suffer gracefully, and in whose endurance there is a natural beauty which simulates, and sometimes even seems to surpass, what is supernatural. To the Christian no sight is more melancholy, than this simulating of grace by nature. It is a problem which makes him thoughtful, but to which no thinking brings a satisfactory solution. With the Christian, kind suffering must be almost wholly supernatural. It is a region in which grace must be despotic, so despotic as hardly to allow nature to dwell in the land. There is a harmonious fusion of suffering and gentleness effected by grace, which is one of the most attractive features of holiness. With quiet and unobtrusive sweetness the sufferer makes us feel as if he were ministering to us, rather than we to him. It is we who are under the obligation. To wait on him is a privilege rather than a task. Even the softening, sanctifying influences of suffering seem to be exercising themselves on us rather than on him. His gentleness is making us gentle. He casts a spell over us. We have all the advantages of being his inferiors, without being vexed with a sense of our inferiority. What is more beautiful than considerateness for others, when we ourselves are unhappy ? It is a grace made out of a variety of graces, and yet, while it makes a deep impression on all who come within the sphere of its influence, it is a very hidden grace. It is part



of those deep treasures of the heart, which the world can seldom rifle.

To be subject to low spirits is a sad liability. Yet, to a vigorous manly heart, it may be a very complete sanctification. What can be more unkind than to communicate our low spirits to others, to go about the world like demons, poisoning the fountains of joy? Have I more light because I have managed to involve those I love in the same gloom as myself? Is it not pleasant to see the sun shining on the mountains, even though we have none of it down in our valley? O the littleness and the meanness of that sickly appetite for sympathy, which will not let us keep our tiny, lilliputian sorrows to ourselves! Why must we go sneaking about, like some dishonourable insect, and feed our darkness on other people's light? We hardly know in all this whether to be more disgusted with the meanness, or more indignant at the selfishness, or more sorrowful at the sin. The thoughts of the dying mother are all concentrated on her newborn child. It is a beautiful emblem of unselfish holiness. So let us also hide our pains and sorrows. But, while we hide them, let them also be spurs within us to urge us on to all manner of overflowing kindness and sunny humour to those around us. When the very darkness within us creates a sunshine around us, then has the spirit of Jesus taken possession of our souls.

Social contact has something irritating in it, even when it is kindest. Those who love us are continually aggravating us, not only unintentionally, but even in the display of their love. Unkindness also abounds, and is of itself vexatious. Something goes wrong daily. It is difficult even for sympathy not to exasperate. Consolation is almost always chafing. We often seem to have come into the world without our skins, so that all intercourse is agony to our sensitiveness. What a field for sanctification all this

opens out to us! Then there is another sort of sweetness under God's visitations; and this shows itself especially in taking all the burden we can off others. For the fact is, that everybody's cross is shared by many. No one carries his own cross wholly. At least such crosses are very rare. I am not quite sure that they exist. Now kind suffering makes us habitually look rather at what others feel of our crosses, than at what we feel of them ourselves. We see our own crosses on other people's shoulders, and overwhelm them with kindness accordingly. It is not we, who have been tossing wakeful all night that are the sufferers, but the poor nurse who has been fighting all night against the sleep of health by our bedside, and only with partial success. It is not we, who cannot bear the least noise in the house, that deserve sympathy, but the poor little constrained children who have not been allowed to make the noise. For to children is there any happiness, which is not also noise? This is the turn of mind, which kindness in suffering gives us. Who will say it is not a most converting thing? But then it must develop itself gracefully. We must do all this unobtrusively, so as not to let others see it is done on purpose. Hence it is that the saints keep silence in suffering. For the mere knowledge of what they suffer is itself a suffering to those who love them. But suffering is a world of miracles. It would fill a book to say all that might be said about kindness under suffering.

Let us conclude. We have been speaking of kindness. Perhaps we might better have called it the spirit of Jesus. What an amulet we should find it in our passage through life, if we would say to ourselves two or three times a day these soft words of Scripture,\* My spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb. But, you will say perhaps, "After all it is a very little virtue,

\* *Ecclus. xxiv. 27.*



very much a matter of natural temperament, and rather an affair of good manners than of holy living." Well! I will not argue with you. The grass of the fields is better than the cedars of Lebanon. It feeds more, and it rests the eye better,—that thymy, daisy-eyed carpet, making earth sweet, and fair, and homelike. Kindness is the turf of the spiritual world, whereon the sheep of Christ feed quietly beneath the Shepherd's eye.

*ON DEATH.*

## I.

## THE ASPECTS OF DEATH.

LIFE is always flowing on like a river, sometimes with murmurs, sometimes without, bending this way and that, we do not exactly see why, now in beautiful picturesque places, now through bare and uninteresting scenes, but always flowing, and with a look of treachery about its flowing, it is so swift, so voiceless, yet so continuous. We naturally begin with life, when we come to speak of death. The aspects of death make us think of the aspects of life. These last are easily summed up. They are simple aspects, aspects of a very terrible simplicity. All life and all lives are travelling towards God. Time is sucking us onward with an insidious rapidity, even when suffering or sameness make life seem to be going slowly. Time rushes, even when it feels as if it dragged. All the actions of life are reparable, except the last, and that is absolutely irreparable, even by any supernatural process. Moreover that last act, which is death, fixes all the other actions of life, and gives them their final meaning. That end of life is also the same to all, the same end to the most variously adventurous lives. Such are the aspects of life. They are aspects of death also. Life gives the character to death. Death is the interpretation of life. The Sacred Writer makes bold to say that he who

always remembers his life's end shall never do amiss. The remembrance of death must therefore be a notable feature in the spiritual life. We must study this death, the remembrance of which is such an adversary to sin, such an aid to holiness.

Let us consider, first of all, the act of dying. It is very simple and very short. Yet all men fear it, and some fear it so much that it casts a shadow over their whole lives. It is the separation of body and soul, the end of that long companionship between them, which is a mystery we have never been able to fathom, and which we should have imagined, if we had not been otherwise taught, involved our very existence, our personality. We can make no satisfactory picture to ourselves of a life without a body. We only know that there is such a life, and that it is a very wonderful one wherever it is lived, and that we shall one day live it somewhere, remaining the same persons that we are now. But how the soul will disentangle itself from that complicated body, in which it now lives ubiquitously, we cannot tell. We only know of certain conditions of the body which hinder it from being the residence of life. Therefore the soul lays it down, and speedily the rejected body flows away in atoms, first the lighter, then the grosser, along that swift, changeful, interweaving current of matter, which girdles the whole world, and is put to all manner of unexpected uses, and submits to millions of unforeseen appropriations. Then, having thus served God briskly and diligently with every one of its busy atoms through all the ages till the day of doom, the body will recover itself with a marvellous identity, and be ours again at the general resurrection. Mother and child, husband and wife, never met on earth with such ecstasy of love, as the body and soul of the just will meet at the resurrection.

This act of dying is moreover a punishment, and the

most ancient of all punishments. It is the Creator's first punishment of the sinning creature, invented by the Creator Himself, the first promulgated invention of His vindictive justice. It can therefore under any circumstances hardly be a light one, whether we consider the Being who thus punishes, or the thing punished, which is sin. Indeed it is a penalty which nothing could render tolerable to the creature, except the Creator Himself suffering it, and diffusing the balm of His own death over the universal deaths of men. It is true that men have desired to die, and they have sinned by the desire, because it was the fruit of an unsanctified impatience. Others have desired to die, but then they were men who had also in them the grace to desire to suffer. Some have desired to die, because they pined for God, and the pains of death were a small price to pay for so huge a good; still they were distinguishably a price. Some deaths have been so beautiful, that they can hardly be recognised for punishments. Such was the death of St. Joseph, with his head pillowed on the lap of Jesus. Yet the twilight bosom of Abraham was but a dull place compared with the house of Nazareth, which the eyes of Jesus lighted. Such was Mary's death, the penalty of which was rather in its delay. It was a soft extinction, through the noiseless flooding of her heart with divine love. Yet divine love is a sharp fire to all flesh which is not yet glorified. Nowhere then has death altogether put off its penal character. Martyrdom is a crown, precisely because it is a cross also. To us death is a punishment due on more indictments than would fill a volume, or could be recited between sunrise and sunset. Yet youth, youth that is young in years, and older youth that is young in holiness, is sometimes ill-advised enough to speak smartly and lightly about this great thing death. A punishment, the oldest punishment, the punishment of

God's own pure invention,—we may not do otherwise than tremble at it. It is a surprising mercy that we are even bidden to be hopeful.

Furthermore, this penal act of dying has ordinarily to be performed at a time and under circumstances when, humanly speaking, we are least capable of a grave and solemn action; or else it is performed so suddenly that it hardly comes under the notion of an act at all. Its natural season is when bodily and mental weakness are both exercising their empire over us, and when our will is as little free as it can be, remaining free at all. It is almost an essential part of the punishment of death, that it takes us at a disadvantage. We want a strong body undistracted by torture, an unclouded mind and a collected will to do many things at once, a long work in a short time, a delicate, perilous, manifold, multiform work, requiring a thousand eyes, and a thousand hands, and a mind, and a memory which perfect calmness may multiply into a thousand memories and a thousand minds. In a word, we never need to be more thoroughly alive than at the moment when we come to die. Instead of which the life is just going out of us. It is flickering in a sort of second childhood. It is engrossed by the pains and cares of this world. Earth never makes itself more imperiously sensible to the soul, than when in a few moments there will be earth no more to us. Speaking naturally, the physical circumstances which bring about our death render all its other circumstances just the reverse of what we could have wished. But we must not complain of this. It is the speciality of the punishment. It is to be thought of, and profited by, rather than lamented. It belongs to all death. The death which has least of it, the death which in itself is most free from this being taken at a disadvantage, is a public execution, as if, when men made death *their* punishment of their guilty fellow, God withdrew from it some of

the frightening aspects, which it has as *His* punishment. Except martyrdom, an unjust public execution would be the most commodious manner of dying, so far as the arrangement of the outward circumstances of death is concerned.

Our forefathers believed, and probably not untruly, that there were especial places which were dear to evil spirits, and which from predilection they haunted from age to age. Whoever dwelt in such places, unless they were strong in the grace of Christ, were harassed by these evil spirits, and were more or less under their influence. There is no doubt that where death is busy, the evil spirits are busy also. A deathbed is a choice time and place for their presence and their machinations. It is their last chance with the departing soul. If alas! he has been their willing prey for years, though as the life is so shall the end be, yet they are not quite secure. Some great compassion of Jesus, some vehement prayer of Mary, some strong sacrament, may break in upon the circle of evil which they fancy they have traced around their victim. The possibilities of mercy are a terror to them. They must be there to guard and claim their own. If death comes at the end of a long and dubious struggle between good and evil, much more need is there for their activity and their stratagems. Final graces are common every day, graces by which the dying soul is illuminated and fortified to make those supernatural acts of repentance, fear, and love by which he is reunited to God, and the Blood of Jesus triumphs at the last. Salvation hung on the balance, and is now secured. From such a deathbed the demons dare not to be absent. They have the Guardian Angel to counterwork. They have the sacraments to baffle. They have the early teaching of the faith about sin and about contrition to suffocate. Alas! they are often enough successful, to make all their patient assiduity well worth their while. Even with the faithful disciples of Christ, they have

a chance, a chance which they too often realise. There is such a thing as a bad death after a good life. Men, who have been keeping to God, or seeming to us to do so, for a long while, have visibly fallen away from Him at the last. If it be but a possibility, let it plunge us in silent fear. Even when the demons are hopeless, they swarm round the dying bed, were it only to harass the servant of our Lord. They may lead him into some venial sin, or some sad unworthiness, or diminish his merits, or lengthen his purgatory. It is the law of their fearful hatred to be always working against the interests of Jesus. Thus it is that where death is, there they are, wounded by heavenly presences, irritated by sweet tranquil heroisms of humble faith, galled by the powers of the Church, and thwarted by the grand energies of the sacraments: nevertheless they are there, to see if perchance they can make any irruption into the kingdom of light; and their presence must be considered as wellnigh inseparable from the act of dying.

Death is also not unfrequently a secret chamber in which God appoints a private and special interview with His failing creature. Sometimes it is to praise, and cheer, and to give us an assurance and a foretaste of our bliss. Sometimes it is to punish, mercifully, very mercifully, yet also, considering time and place, very severely, as if He partially judged us before the time, that He might punish us on this side the grave. He has perhaps been offended with particular acts of our past life, and He has said nothing, but waited till now; and now He punishes. Either He sends panics into our souls, or gives us a piercing vision of these particular faults, or permits temptations, such temptations as are congenial to those faults; or in some other way He chastises us, and it is hard to bear, though it is a mighty love. He thus makes death doubly a punishment, a private punishment as well as a public one. In many cases the deathbed



is thus a double one. There is the deathbed, with the priest, and the physician, and the friends, around the ailing creature; and there is the same deathbed in an inner room, where the Father of all creatures is alone with His child, in communications too intimate ever to be disclosed to living ear. We may well fear this silent visit of our Eternal Father. Yet it is to be our joy to live with Him for ever; let us bear then with filial submission the pains which His compassionate but exceeding jealousies may give us at that last hour of life.

Such is the act of dying, with the circumstances which ordinarily belong to it. But we must not omit also to recount some of its features, which are familiar to all of us, yet are needful to the picture. The first is, that it is inevitable. It comes to all. There is no escape. There are no exceptions. I remember as a boy succeeding in persuading myself that I should not die, and living for some years in that persuasion. It was not that I thought myself better than others. But I fancied something would happen, the end of the world or something. I was not particular about my motives of credibility for what I was so eager to believe. But the opposite conviction, which was not forced upon me till my teens, brought with it a season of crushed hopes and incessant hauntings, which I tremble to think of even now. Perhaps all children have once had a half-formed delusive hope that they individually will not die. With myself it is to this day always an interesting truth, one that never palls, never tires, never grows dull through familiarity, but is always stirring, and new, and original, that death is inevitable. Different things happen to different men. God never seems to repeat destinies. All destinies are individual. Each man has his own. But it is the common destiny to die.

Moreover it is an act of which we have no experience,

because it is done only once. We may seem to all intents and purposes to have died before. We may have believed we were dying, and may have arranged ourselves with such self-collection as we could. We may have made what we were sure was our last confession. We may have been anointed, and had the last blessing of the Church. Our eye may have closed, and our head sunk back heavily into insensibility. But God knew we were not dying. Probably the evil spirits knew we were not dying. So that many supernatural realities were absent from that seeming death, which will be present at our actual death. No! We have no experience of dying. This is the simple fact. What follows from it? Something of great importance, which is not without terror also, namely, that as we have no experience of it, we can form no habit of it, and it is habit which at once makes the thing to be done easier, and us who do it calmer in the doing. But may not this be said of any important action, which is to be done for the first time? Yes; but then it is another feature of death, that with it there is no next time. It has to be done but once. Everything depends upon the doing of it well. However it is done, well or ill, it is simply irreparable. Once over, all discussion, deliberation, retrospect, discovery of mistakes, fresh plans, are out of the question. It was one, absolute, final, immutable act; and now that it is done, it must be left as it is, helplessly fertile of eternal consequences.

It also adds to the difficulty of dying with that tranquillity, dignity, and preparation, which we should desire, that the time of it is uncertain. Age furnishes us with the merest probabilities regarding it, which have a certain universal likelihood about them, available to staticians, helpful to insurance offices, capable of feeding ambitious or mercenary expectations. But to the individual they are in reality no probabilities at all. There is no improbability in

our dying this very next moment. Perhaps we shall. Then, when the moment elapses, the next moment succeeds to the same possibility, nay to a possibility increasing continually into a greater likelihood. It is the hereditary property of all the moments of life, by night or by day. Sudden deaths are far from uncommon. They also often come in batches in the same neighbourhood, as if there was an undiscovered law about them, which there probably is. Indeed the freedom of all human actions seems to have amplest scope in its sphere, and yet to have a sphere, and to represent a law even though it is not controlled by it. The statistics of crime appear to indicate some such mysterious and unmanageable fact. So then there is no such improbability of a sudden death. The known peculiarities of our constitutions may increase the probabilities to us individually, as, for example, if we have been threatened with apoplexy, or have a cognisable heart-complaint. On the other hand, the extremest old age cannot be sure of dying the next moment. Even when we are in our agony, science can only give us an approximation to the length of its endurance. Thus it is one of the universal features of death, to which even martyrdom and public executions are not infallible exceptions, that the moment of death is uncertain. We may be rescued from martyrdom, or our grace may fail, or rather our correspondence to it, and we may save ourselves by apostasy. We may be pardoned on the scaffold, or we may die before the moment of our execution comes. Death is therefore universally uncertain. If it gives us warning by an illness, it is a grace. If there is a prediction of sudden death in the specialty of our constitutions, that is a still greater grace. But further than this, death spares none of us the full inconvenience of its uncertainty.

Let us now take a history of dying, and imagine it under the most favourable circumstances. The man shall have

notice to die, time to die, and all the best circumstances of dying. Let us assume it to happen in our own case. An illness comes to us. From the first we perceive that it is of a serious character. We have feelings within ourselves, so different from those of previous illnesses, that we cannot but account of them as prophecies of death. We see our danger in the eyes of those around us. We are fortunate in being surrounded by Christians, and therefore, at whatever risk of actually hastening our death by agitation, we are told, gently but plainly, that the end is come. Those who love us make a great sacrifice of themselves in telling us this. It is the kindest of all kindnesses, although the withholding of it would be cruelty and sin. Many souls are in hell now from this selfish cruelty. Mothers have thus sent their children there, not seeing that it was to spare themselves rather than their children that they were so barbarously silent. Husbands too there have been who lost their last chance, because the love of their wives was but a covert selfishness. O there is little love on earth which puts the soul before the body!

We have received the announcement of our approaching end with calmness, but not without considerable fear. God has been our first thought. Happy for us, if He has always been so! We know that the great work is to be done with Him down in the depths of our own souls. We send for the priests, and with such examination of conscience as we can, or, better still, from notes prepared beforehand, we make a general confession of our whole lives. We detest all our sins from the bottom of our hearts, so far as we can be judges of our own sincerity. We abhor them as offences against God, with an abhorrence that involves the strongest purpose of not repeating them, should we be unexpectedly raised up from this seeming deathbed. Indeed years have already passed since we committed them. So we trust here is

evidence of our efficacy of purpose. Nevertheless we are so weak, are suffering so much from bodily pain, and are altogether so tremulous and fluttered, that we certainly do not feel that sensibly keen sorrow which we had beforehand hoped to feel. The priest however, who has questioned us anxiously, is satisfied with our answers, and we are absolved. In our lives before we have never doubted an absolution; but now we would fain have something more like an assurance of its validity. For consider what a brink it is we are on! But it is still twilight. Faith is a light, but it is not open day yet.

We make a profession of our faith, especially in the real presence of Jesus with us in His sacrament of love. We doubt nothing. The pillow under our head is not a rest more palpable than the truth of our dearest Lord's Divinity is to our soul, now grown heavy with the heaviness of death. We feel we have never known our Blessed Lady till now, so manifest has her maternal office become to us, so clearly is she one of the nurses round our bed. Even dark things are plain now. Faith is just going to dissolve like a mist. The boundaries of faith and sight are ceasing to be defined. Truly we shall need faith in purgatory; but it is under conditions there, which give it the certainty of sight, without the bliss of the Vision. Furthermore, we think if we have any enemies. None perhaps that we know of; for enemy is a strong word. However, we forgive from the bottom of our hearts any such that there may be, and all who have ever wronged us, were it only to the amount of a sarcastic speech or an unkind look. We also beg pardon of all whom we have ever offended in the heyday of our selfish health, and in the velocity of our success. We see more of this in our memories than we were aware of. So we cleanse our hearts of all little spites, jealousies, suspicions, vindictivenesses, unbeliefs, dis-

tastes, prejudices, persuasions, hardnesses, unforgivingnesses, and wants of sympathy, which we now see to have been fearfully against charity. What evil plight we were in in this respect, and we had not a suspicion of it! Thank God for this last sharp light! But we are growing exhausted.

Nevertheless here is a great effort to be made. Our Lord is coming, as our Viaticum. We must rally all the flagging energies of our souls. We would kneel if they would only let us. We will do our best. Alas! bodily weakness has gone too far. We have managed to swallow, and we have sunk back with our eyes closed, very tired, yet happy. Still we remember sweeter Communion than this Viaticum, more love, more heat, more sensible union. Death is a great distraction. No doubt of it. We are making but a poor thanksgiving. This also we have often done better in lifetime. But they are rousing us now to receive Extreme Unction. It is soft and soothing. Yet perhaps it calls unconfessed sins to mind. We have certainly been more sensual and comfort-loving in our lives than we have ever accused ourselves of being. But this is a sacrament of capacious receptacles. There is no saying what grace it holds. We know that in its abysses the relics and after-harvests of the sins of the longest life are put away, and buried with an eternal burying. Singular sacrament of most indefinite magnificence! let me not be defrauded of thee at the last!

There is time left. It is filled up with a variety of acts, spoken or unspoken, as the case may be. Short acts of love of God are multiplied continually, together with ejaculations betokening our utter trust in the Precious Blood of Jesus. Acts of sorrow for sin are also perpetually recurring to our lips, feeble perhaps, but sincere. We voluntarily accept death in penance for our sins, and we



humbly tell God so. We hardly know what we say, but we mean by it all that it can be made to mean, all that He takes it to mean. Our tongue is swollen, and our voice is as good as gone. We have no moisture to make words with. But in the silent chambers of our hearts Holy Names are echoing softly, as if they were the last whisperings of grace, as if faith would die professing itself, even though none of those around could hear. Our confessor is less help to us than we thought he would be; as if we had got so near God now, that we were under His sole, or rather His immediate, jurisdiction. Yet also the confessor is of immense use, with his repeated absolutions, his holy water, his signs of the cross, his mere anointed presence, the character on his brow, his hands impregnated with the odour of the Host. Long since, his suggestions ceased to help us, because we had ceased to hear. Then we could see his words shape themselves on his lips. Now that is gone: there is a teasing blue film: now a darkness, and with it a painful desire for light, but no tongue to tell it with. Is everything done? Are we ready? No! now there are many things to say. Alas! they cannot be said. There are many things to do, so many that some one must help us to put them in order. Order! that is what we want. We could put things in order once. Now we have lost the power. What shall we do first? But what is this? Can the end be come? Earth is going, or we are leaving it: whither are we sinking? Will no one bear us up? It is growing light.

Yes! the soul has left the body, and our last, or almost our last, thought as we went was, that there were still so many things left to do. Yet this is death under its most favourable circumstances, in truth the circumstances of the favoured few. So we believe it always is with all deaths, that the last object the light of death falls upon is the



manifest fact, that there are still so many things left to do. This, depend upon it, is one of the invariable aspects of Christian death, that it comes a little suddenly, a little too soon, when we were nearly ready but not quite; so that we set off on that last journey, as on so many other journeys, leaving something behind which we meant to take. What is left behind always seems indispensable; the mercy is that in reality it is not so. Our death has its sufficiency; it only wanted its finish. But this is a law: all deaths want it. Yet it is a want which makes the prospect somewhat more nervous.

Let us now consider some of the varieties of death, in order that we may obtain a yet more complete idea of its manifold aspects. It is probable that no two deaths are quite alike. Each man's death is individual, like himself, like his vocation on earth, like his grace on this side the grave, and like his glory on the other. Even such varieties of death as we can classify are extremely numerous, and more than we have space to enter upon here. We must content ourselves with selecting some of the more common ones.

First of all, there is sudden death. This is as if we were alive at the end of the world, when Christ comes, and we die as we are caught up into the air to meet Him. Or, again, it is as though we never died, but were judged without the intermediate step of death. We lose death, so far as it is an opportunity. We have a season of grace less than other men. Our eternal doom is risked more fearfully than with other men. Death is a means of salvation. Sudden death deprives us of this. Hence none but an irreligious mind can ever desire a sudden death, although it is very tempting so far as the momentariness of the physical pain is concerned, or the consecutive endurance of that long harrowing drama in many acts, of which death

is so often composed. But the importance of death is in its position, as the barrier between time and eternity. Consequently our eternal interests are the grand objects to secure; and for the most part, the more death puts us through, the more dying we have, the greater is the likelihood of our making good the eternity beyond. Even although a sudden death is not necessarily an unprovided death, the Church makes us pray against both of them. We have not only no right to be uncaged so swiftly, but it is unsafe also. Indeed we have already seen that all deaths are sudden, and that this suddenness, this surprise, is one of the disquieting aspects of our last great act. We cannot afford therefore to wish it more sudden than it is too sure to be. There is a deep feeling in the minds of men, that a sudden death is a judgment from God. There is no doubt an equally deep truth, which this feeling represents. At the same time the rule is so far from being invariable, especially since our Blessed Lord's death, which has given death quite a new countenance, that we may never dare to attribute it in the case of others to their sins and to God's anger. They may be taken suddenly, as if by a swift blast of compassion, from occasions of sin or from trying circumstances, which would be too much for their strength. Some persons with a tendency to particular diseases fall down dead, and yet these are hardly sudden deaths, because, if they have been aware of that tendency, they have had preparation thrust upon them all through life. Still they have been deprived of an opportunity. Perhaps also a sudden death may often imply a long purgatory, inasmuch as our last illness and death make a great theatre for Christian satisfaction, to say nothing of the facile indulgences which crowd round the children of the faith at that last hour.

Opposed to this, we have lingering deaths, deaths of weeks or months, like those of consumption, to which the

Italians give the name of "deaths of the predestinate," a title which some holy men, with a venturous trust in the divine compassions and a magnificent faith in the sacraments, have given to public executions. These lingering deaths, however, look more desirable than they turn out to be for the most part in reality. The fact is, they are too long. All things are best in moderation, even the allowance of time to die in. Lingerings deaths seem to give us ample time for preparation; but the truth is they injure our preparation by giving us too much. Many of the diseases, which imply such deaths, are also especially subject to false hopes, to a disbelief in the proximity of death; and this is a basis of many perilous temptations. Moreover we get callous as the process goes on, and a valetudinarian love of comfort is by no means a wholesome atmosphere to die in. The suspension of penance is an awkward moment in which to accomplish the transit from time to eternity. An unworthy desire of death grows upon us. We look at it as a physical relief. We become impatient to die, yet not impatient to see God; and for this very insensibility revelations have disclosed to us that there is a special purgatory. Furthermore, venial sins accrue very rapidly in these protracted deaths, sins of impatience, of immortification, of temper, of selfishness, and of censoriousness about our nurses. We come also to dispense ourselves too easily from ejaculatory prayers and the application of our minds to God. Our virtue softens before dying, softens dangerously, and may need a sharp purgatory to anneal it again. Indeed these lingering deaths, while they seem to mean a short purgatory, may often have to be followed by a long purgatory, just because they themselves were so long. There is no one familiar with deathbeds, who has not observed how often the grace of dying well wears out before its time. For awhile the death promises to be more than

good, to be saintly, to be wonderful. Then it is as if grace had been given in material quantity, so much to last so many hours, and the poor sufferer outlives his grace, and dies at last, not, let us hope, a dubious death, but by no means a death which it will be any pleasure, for us who love him, to remember in the retrospect. It would be unwise of us, therefore, to desire these very lingering deaths. I believe all deaths to be mercies, since the day our Lord died; mercies to the individual whose needs and peculiarities his Heavenly Father knows. But, speaking of these lingering deaths in themselves, they are less desirable really than they seem.

Then there are deaths from violent pain. Each man probably has a special dread of some particular disease; and this dread is not unfrequently a prophecy of its fixing upon him at the last. While we shrink from all great pain, we are most anxious to choose the kind of pain which is to be inevitable to ourselves. When we have fallen into the power of a pain which we especially shun, we are like men whom a wild beast is holding down. There is a sort of despairing horror which it is hard to change into a religious disposition. Indeed it is true of all pain, that it is more often a distraction from God than a memento of Him. Those things, which make God most indispensable to us, are far from being the things which most successfully drive us into the arms of God. Love has always been a completer instrument than fear. To be sanctified by illness is quite one of the rarest phenomena of the spiritual life. Some of the greatest writers on asceticism have noticed this. It is only high holiness which is not distracted, lowered, and made animal, by pain. A death from violent pain, therefore, will only sanctify those who have a previously formed interior spirit, which will enable them to bear it rightly. While it is a terrible affliction to the bystanders, it is often

a mark of divine love. We may also believe that it frequently stands in the stead of purgatory. In experience we see that it is repeatedly accompanied by an unusual gift of contrition, which is one of the clearest signs of predestination. It is sometimes also the lot of those, who in lifetime have been too easy with themselves in the matter of bodily penance; and then it comes to them partly as a punishment, but much more as a merciful opportunity, making up in its single self for many neglected opportunities. Those also who have wanted that gentleness, childlikeness, and considerate affection, which weak health and constant bodily pain are made by grace to produce, are sometimes visited by this kind of death, in order that it may produce a change in their souls corresponding to those qualities. The most we can say of such a death is, that it is a grand, but most difficult, opportunity of sanctification.

We now come to a quiet easy death. This also, like the long lingering death, is less desirable than at first sight it appears, though doubtless to multitudes it is an immense mercy, a special tenderness of God. For there are some souls so fragile, they look as if the mere act of dying will shatter them to pieces. There are some characters which are weakly rather than imperfect; and it is such who are often as it were indulged by this kind of death. It seems to be no augury of long or short purgatory, but appears sometimes as if it were the beginning of not a very high place in heaven. It is also a common termination of a life of suffering, as if purgatory were already over, and death on the other side of the judgment-seat rather than on this. A life without great sins often ends with a death like this, and a life with a very strongly marked vocation almost always so. For such a life is a life of strong light, of definite consciousness; and its grand result is a great gift of tranquillity;

and to such men death almost loses the character of death. It is a great action which comes in their way, and is done greatly and quietly, without drama and without emphasis. Certain forms of the spiritual life are followed by such deaths. It has been curiously remarked by St. Andrew Avellino,\* that those who have a special devotion to the Passion, generally die quiet and sweet deaths, as Mary, John, and Magdalene did.† Certainly it is remarkable that while most of those about our Lord died violent deaths, the three who assisted at Calvary should have died so softly, as if already their real death had been died there. Yet a quiet easy death is not without its dangers, such as drowsiness, inapprehension, unsuspectingness, inaction, delusion, and the like. There are some men whose energies and sensibilities seem always to go to sleep when the rough cold weather of life comes on, men who have no winters, but who, like marmots in their burrows, live lives of endless summers pieced together by this lying dormant in the cold. They are men who are no better for anything which happens to them, nay, which is almost a more hopeless feature, are no worse for anything which happens. To them what can

\* Vita, 8vo Edition, p. 59.

† It is remarkable that the death of St. John has been the subject of some most interesting special revelations. One is recorded by S. Bridget in the first chapter of her fourth book, where St. John says to her: "After the Mother of God I passed from this world by a most light death, because I had been her guardian." In the twenty-third chapter of the same fourth book, the Saint says that she heard our Blessed Lady say to St. John, "God called you out of the world by a most light death, *quia Virgo Virgini fuit commendata.*" S. Gertrude also in the fourth chapter of her fourth book speaks of her wonder at St. John's tranquil death, and of our Lord's answer to her questions, in which He says that He took John out of the world by a death of jubilee. St. Mechtildis in the seventh chapter of her first book enumerates as the twelfth of the twelve privileges of St. John, that he died a painless death. See also the commentaries of Durandus de Sancto Angelo on S. Bridget, and the approbation of Dom Michel de Escartin to the Mystical City of Agreda.



a quiet death be but a judgment? It is God letting them die without awakening them. We may remark of all quiet deaths, that they are not converting deaths, nor deaths for repentances to be done in. Conversion must be done before, or it will not be done then.

Let us consider one more variety of death, death amidst temptations. This is very terrible, yet not uncommon. It is often the end of a careless life, of a life negligent in details, which contented itself with generals rather than particulars, and took liberties with God, and made free with the precepts of the Church, and was wanting in reverence and fear. Then, on the other hand, it is sometimes also the end of a very holy life, especially if it is cut short in point of years. For years of merit may be acquired in moments of deathbed temptations. Temptation always accelerates the speed of grace. But this is eminently the case on deathbeds. God may visit His servants with such a death in order to enable them to gain greater glory in heaven. Or it may be that their spiritual life has been wanting in inward trials, and that the mystical purgation of their spirits may not have been complete, and therefore He vouchsafes to perfect their holiness by this manner of death. On this side the grave Divine Love has no crucible more delicate than this of a death amidst temptations. Yet it is one which is most painful to the survivors, because it is curtained round with impenetrable gloom, indeed with anxiety and dismay, if the temptations have lasted to the end. But in most cases it is not so. Just at last the cloud lifts, and discloses a golden horizon, with its outline clear and its edge defined. Could we but bend over, what should we see but the brightness of a blessed eternity, and the vicinity of an immediate heaven, with no deep lake of cleansing fire between? Sad as the first prospect of these curtains of temptation is to the beholder, they cover some



operations of grace which for grandeur and sublimity have no equals elsewhere. Moreover they are graces which are instantaneously efficacious. They turn lofty things in upon our souls in a moment. They fix and stereotype all previous acquisitions of grace. They are the very beginnings of eternal glory, desperately painful, like ecstasies, because they are out of place, and come before their time. But the high and the low, how often do they lie together in the same coil, where spiritual matters are concerned! These same temptations are not unfrequently a penal retribution to easy and ungenerous souls for neglecting certain portions of the spiritual life, and especially, for neglecting habits of mental prayer. Ah! how many dry meditations are waiting for us at that last turn in life, to refresh our scorched souls with their unexpected dew; and how many omitted and shortened meditations are also waiting for us there, to sting us like scorpions, when we shall find the pain least tolerable! There are many things which it is hard to face in death; there are few harder to face than neglected prayer.

Such are some of the varieties of death. What the varieties of result may be, which they each of them realise, is beyond our sight. They are the first parts of eternity, indescribable, unimaginable. There may be some souls, whom death runs far onward into eternity, and some whom it leaves only at the edge. All who die well are safe with God. These then are the aspects of that great phenomenon of death, not a foreign thing, but something which we ourselves have to pass through. As the life is, so shall the end be. Can we say less than that death is the whole significance of life?

## ON DEATH.

## II.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF DEATH.

DEATH is an unsurveyed land, an unarranged science. There are continual new discoveries being hourly made in it by all men in person. All human actions are wonderful things. Each of them seems to contain depths of miracle. As conscience is the best inward evidence of God, so human actions are the best outward evidences of Him. But this last human act, which closes all series of human actions, this act of dying, is the most fertile in wonders. Its interest is intense from whatever point of view we look at it, and we may be sure that no man, until he has died himself, at all appreciates the marvellousness of death. Perhaps, as I have said, no two deaths are quite alike; and the most delicate shades of difference between one death and another would probably disclose to us more of the ways of God and more of the capabilities of the soul, than philosophy has ever taught. But we never see death from the other side, from the eternal side; and therefore we cannot do justice to it. It is not a mere date; it is not simply the end of life. It is the confluence of time and eternity, the transition of grace into glory. It is a divine punishment made now into a most hidden operation of grace. Each separate death is an undisclosed secret between the Creator and the crea-

ture. So that, while we are studying death, it teases us to feel that we have to confine ourselves to what is general, while the real wonder of death is, more than is the case with most mysteries, in the details and the particulars. All we know is, that justice and mercy seem to come to us separately in life; whereas in death their operations are combined, and they are only one. Death belongs as much to the eternity which it begins, as to the life which it ends. Perhaps more. In lifetime we can but feel death on its outside, and report of its inward possibilities from its outward phenomena. Having thus estimated our speculations at no more than they are worth, let us pass from the aspects of death to consider its characteristics.

It has characteristic pains, characteristic temptations, characteristic graces, and characteristic joys, and we must study these in order. To contemplate the pains of death is like looking for the first time over some wide scene of savage and mountainous desolation. The heights are hung with melancholy clouds. The glens run up among the foldings of the hills, and are lost to view. A mist lies over the stone-sprinkled ground, which is so girdled with swamps as to be impenetrable. No man is wisely bold who can think, without some fear, of the journey he must one day make across that disconsolate region. Body, will, mind, affections, even our supernatural habits, have, each of them, pains of their own. With regard to the physical pains of death, we may suppose them, from many analogies, to be unlike any other pains. The separation of body and soul must itself be a strange, unbearable distress, even if it be not a positive pain. The face works at that moment, as it never works at any other time. The eyes look as if some woful surprise was in the soul. To all appearance there is something more than mere suffocation in the act of dying. At the same time it need not be that the physical pains of death should be

greater than any others, or that they should be great at all. Experience and observation would seem to show that comparatively few persons die in much pain. Even where there has been great agony nearly up to the last, the last itself has generally been in peace and in comparative ease. Medical science teaches us the same thing. It does not say death is not painful, but that it is not very painful, and that most men suffer pains in life, which, for mere amount of pain, exceed the pain of dying. Even physical fear, which would be itself a pain, is far less common than we should have expected. Perhaps there is not much consolation in this last feature of the case. For it would appear to intimate that the hour of death is even less favourable than we supposed for the transactions of the soul. No reasonable being, except under strong grace, could possibly confront death without fear, unless he were labouring under some deafness, dulness, or other proximity to stupefaction, brought on by the sickness of the act itself; and such things as these do not promise well for that keen view of sin, and self, and God, which efficacious acts of faith, love, and sorrow must imply. It shows also the intense necessity of the powerful sacraments and benedictions of the Church, as supplying and filling out those inward acts which the state of the soul may render sluggish. Nevertheless, although the physical pains of death are often spoken of in an exaggerated way, there are possibilities enough to give us something like a feeling of dismay when we consider them. Yet they are far the least important of death's pains.

It is to be apprehended also, that our physical weakness will give rise to a peculiar mental pain. We do not for the most part fall into such a state of torpor as not to be sensible of the nature of our position. We understand what death is. The light of our faith is not dimmed. If sin, and self, and God, are not before us with their old

clearness, they are clearly enough before us to be felt as overshadowing our souls. We have not become mere animals, though we seem on the road to it. Hence arises a peculiar pain, from the knowledge and feeling that our minds and energies are not up to the mark, are unequal to the occasion. We see a point close at hand, and we cannot reach it. We have a distinct ideal, and may not realise it. We believe, but our belief falls a little short. We grieve for sin, but our grief, like water poured over a garden on a winter's day, does not run into our souls, but freezes on the surface. We love, but it is the brightness of love without its fire. We know that a form of sound words is always valuable, because, outward as it is, it is almost always an interior help; but we feel now that we have to trust, rather more than we like to trust, to the orthodoxy and accuracy of our acts of faith, hope, love, and contrition. The wedding garments, in which we have so often clothed our souls, are found to have shrunk, just when it is too late to alter them, and here is the Bridegroom visibly riding up to the gate. We want so little, yet that little is so hopelessly wanted. All this, we trust, will be much more in the feeling than in the reality. Nevertheless, the result of it will be a feeling of impotence which will be most hard to bear, a sort of spiritual nightmare, a train of thought during a fall from a precipice, the sinking of a boat upon a shipless sea. It will be an inward sinking of soul, when we can least bear such sinkings. Surely it will make us sick at heart.

This is the mental pain which our present gives us. The contribution of our past will perhaps be heavier still. The very darkness which is around us, will somehow concentrate the light on our past lives. Who does not know that the hour of death is an hour of revelations? We are already acquainted with the phenomena of the growing sensitiveness of conscience. We know how we come to

see sin, where we saw none before, and what a feeling of insecurity about the past that new vision has often given us. Yet death is a sudden stride into the light. Even in our general confessions the past was discernible in a kind of soft twilight : now it will be dragged out into unsheltered splendour. The dawn of the judgment, mere dawn though it be, is brighter than any terrestrial noon ; and it is a light which magnifies more than any human microscope. There lie fifty crowded years, or more. O such an interminable-seeming waste of life, with actions piled on actions, and all swarming with minutest incredible life, and an element of eternity in every nameless moving point of that teeming wilderness ! How colossal will appear the sins we know of, so gigantic now that we hardly know them again ! How big our little sins ! How full of malice our faults that seemed but half-sins, if they were sins at all ! Then again, the forgotten sins, who can count them ? Who believed they were half so many, or half so serious ? The unsuspected sins, and the sinfulness of our ignorances, and the deliberateness of our indeliberations, and the rebellions of our self-will, and the culpable recklessness of our precipitations, and the locust-swarms of our thought-peopled solitudes, and the incessant persevering cataracts of our poisoned tongues, and the inconceivable arithmetic of our multiplied omissions,—and a great solid neglected grace lying by the side of each one of these things,—and each one of them as distinct, and quiet, and quietly compassed, and separately contemplated, and overpoweringly light-girdled, in the mind of God, as if each were the grand sole truth of His self-sufficing unity ! Who will dare to think that such a past will not be a terrific pain, a light from which there is no terrified escape ? Or who will dare to say that his past will not look such to him, when he lies down to die. Surely it would be death itself to our entrapped and amazed



souls, if we did not see the waters of the great flood rising far off, and sweeping onward with noiseless, but resistless inundation, the billows of that Red Sea of our salvation, which takes away the sins of the world, and under which all those Egyptians of our own creation, those masters whom we ourselves appointed over us, with their living hosts, their men, their horses, their chariots, and their incalculable baggage, will look in the morning-light of eternity, but a valley of sunlit waters.

The future also comes to us in the shape of pain. It is an uncertainty, and uncertainty is hard to bear. The unspeakable greatness of the risk, the immensity of the interests at stake, the sense of utter inadequacy so far as our own merits are concerned, and our own sensible want of present energy, combine to make us perhaps exaggerate the uncertainty of our position, while the extreme nearness of the decision cannot but agitate us painfully. God may give us, as He so often does, a grace of calm assurance, which will counteract this agitation. But the agitation itself belongs to death as one of its proper pains, and we have no right to reckon on the grace. As our past life is magnified by the nearness of an all-holy judgment, so the mountains of eternity, like all mountains, look higher as we approach them. The grandeur of the reward almost dismays us. Can such things be for us? Are we fitting company for angels and for saints? Are we, such as we are, to go and sit down at the foot of Mary's throne? Shall we in another five minutes be clasping in speechless gratitude the wounded Feet of Jesus? Can our purity bear the blaze of God, and not turn to ashes? Almost by force our eyes are turned away from heaven. We look through the gloom in the direction of purgatory. Even that "profound lake" is too good for us. Yet how intolerable its pains! Its least pain, as seems most probable from authorities, greater



than all the accumulated pains of mortals from Adam downwards, its long lingering delays, as revelations certify, the practically infinite capabilities of suffering in a separate soul, the weariness of waiting for the Vision which intense desire makes more weary than any weariness we can know of,—these are our uncertainties in that direction. Then, in another direction still, what unthinkable possibilities! The word of doom will be spoken soon. God has known all along what it is to be. A few more efforts in drawing our breath, and we shall know it too.

These are the pains of death, such pains as we have seen others bear, pains such that we can understand something of their nature. But who can doubt that there are also unknown and unimaginable pains to be met with in that dark valley, of a new sort, and which will not range themselves with other pains? These also must we think of with fear, and trust God for grace to bring us through them, and for tenderness to measure them out to us in exceeding moderation.

We come now to the temptations of death. Of course these are very various, and a dying man may be tempted to almost any sin. Nevertheless we are only to concern ourselves here with what may be called the characteristic temptations of death. It cannot be a matter of surprise to us, that the chief among these are temptations to infidelity. It is our faith which is saving us. It is upon our faith that we are leaning our whole weight. It is naturally there that the tempter will try us. Indeed the natural laws of our own minds, without any preternatural interference, would lead us to expect these very distressing temptations. We are trusting God just then far more than we have ever trusted Him before. Our trust in Him is all we have left. We are concentrating ourselves upon it. We can do but little ourselves, even in the way of co-operation, or corre

spondence to grace. The most active, and what is called edifying, deathbed is far more of a passive than an active exhibition. The very demand made upon our faith provokes doubt, while the extremity of its importance seems to magnify the doubt. These temptations often come to those who have been but little tempted in that way during life. If the absence of the temptations has been due to the brightness of their faith, the hour of trial comes now as an opportunity of higher sanctity. If it has been due to indifference and an inadequate interest in divine things, the temptations come now on a mission of punishment and retribution, adding another huge risk to the other risks with which the chamber of death is already so beset. But the cruel refining of these temptations is more fiery to those who in lifetime have been subjected to them, and who with a sort of half-pious petulance and querulous exaggeration have dwelt upon them in their own minds, and spoken of them almost braggingly to others. These men soon bring about a habit of such temptations, and then earth becomes a hell, and life no longer a trial but a torture. They lose that beautiful dismay, in which the religious spirit is ever standing, self-astonished, before the majesty of God. Losing that, there is little else left for them to lose. But the retribution at the hour of death is inconceivably dreadful.

So again boisterous, controversial minds seem likely to be assailed by this form of temptation. Temptations against the faith for the most part belong to narrow minds. They generally betoken want of depth. Now boisterous minds are always narrow minds. They have generally fixed ideas, and if their fixed idea goes, all else goes with it. They have all their lives wished to be dictators, domestic or otherwise; and they can so little believe that people will not elect them to that office, that they take to clamouring, and even shrieking, as if they had lost all control,

when things go silently on as if they had neither pronounced, acted, written, or made a sign, indeed as if they existed not. In spiritual, as well as in intellectual things, delicacy alone is strength. When these men confront a broad eternal truth, and confront it inside themselves, they find that they have fallen into a perfect ambush of temptations against the faith. Men of great activity are also subject to this trial. They have not made their religion sufficiently a part of their mind, or even of their heart. It has been mostly in their eye and in their arms. In these days especially, our own activity often persecutes us. Some men are positively hunted through life by themselves; and this strange self-pursuit makes them, not only a problem to others, but an amazement to themselves. A man, who lets himself have too many things to do, is always a foolish man, if he is not a guilty one; and he is apt to be eaten up by his own businesses, as Actæon was by his own dogs. On his deathbed he is alone. External things are gone. There is his habit of activity, and nothing but his one quality of faith left for him to exercise it on. He finds he has never fathomed the commonest things in religion, and now, with the ruling passion strong in death, he cannot rest, but fathoms the shallows of his own soul, and finds them bottomless. These are the classes of men whom these temptations visit: but they belong to the time and the place, and may visit all, even the most unlikely souls.

Temptations to despair form another class of temptations which belong to deathbeds. But I believe them to be far from common. Even approaches to despair, misgivings which seem as if they could become temptations to despair, as if they could develop into them, are not ordinary features in a deathbed to any very great extent. In a certain degree they come to all, as might be expected, and

in any degree they must necessarily be disquieting. But, in their fully developed state, we may set them down as extremely rare. They seem to spring from clearness of faith, combined with an absence of practical knowledge of God, and they would appear to be the punishment of a self-trusting life. Confidence in God is one of those elements of the supernatural life, which it is desirable should take also the form of a familiar habit; and certainly he who knows his own sinfulness for the first time, or the immensity of God's mercy for the first time, when he comes to die, may easily find despair to be the issue of the very undoubtingness of his faith. We must, however, be careful to distinguish between temptations to despair, and those strange temptations to blasphemy of which we sometimes read. These last seem to take rank among the mystical trials of souls that are very high in grace, and whom God sees able to bear the extreme heat of such refining processes. I remember something like these temptations in a case, which certainly arose from the effects of stimulants given to the dying man, combined with the fulness of his mind upon religious subjects; and partly the loss of his self-control, and partly the sense that it *was* lost, and hence the effort to recover it, caused him to speak as he would not else have spoken.

When the beginnings of despair, or at least trouble amounting to more than misgiving, are perceived in the dying, those, who have intimately known such men's antecedents, have observed that this is a trial, of which two things are to be said; first, that it is for the most part some way off from the act of death, at an earlier period, and even before the agony; and secondly, that those who are thus visited, have been wanting in holy fear during their lives. It seems as if fear had a lesson to teach, which can only be taught on this side the grave, and that those, who

will not spread it over their lives, must learn it by a vehement, hurried, and concentrated effort at the last. Indeed we may say, that there is nothing in life, which exercises a more blessed influence on death, than the prominence of holy loving fear in our intercourse with God. Past fear is the smoothest pillow on which the head of the dying can repose. With regard, then, to these temptations to despair, books tell us that they are deathbed temptations; but experience seems to show that they are exceedingly rare, except in that mitigated form which we have just mentioned as the penalty for over-familiarity and liberty with God. I have never seen an instance of real temptations to despair, and should not have mentioned them in this connection, except through a legitimate fear of differing from the consent of writers on the subject.

Then there is a class of temptations, which belong perhaps rather to the end of a serious illness than to death, but which so habitually tease the dying, that we cannot omit them. In the greater number of cases death follows upon an illness more or less long, an illness which has often worn threadbare our grace of endurance. Patience, even if it remain substantially in the soul, has put off its dignity, broken its silence, and taken to complaining. Deep down in our hearts, the merciful penetration of God may satisfy itself that we are still conformed to His will, but our conformity has lost its gracefulness. When death ensues after a long illness, then these temptations, which in reality belong to the illness, seem to form part of the process of the deathbed, and it is the solemnity of our danger which gives to these temptations their peculiar vexatiousness. They are temptations to *little* sins, to sins which shame us by their unworthiness, and also make us suspect something greatly wrong in our inward dispositions because of their unfitness and unseasonableness. Among them we may

reckon a temptation to greediness, to selfishness, to talking about self, to a greater amount of irritability than our sufferings will cover in the way of excuse, to uncharitable suspicions, to petulance with God, and to certain forms of untruthfulness. Who has not seen how often these things dishonour the sick bed, which is else giving evidence of so many graces and of so much presence of God? It may well be doubted whether the moral significance of these temptations is very considerable. Nevertheless earnest men make fewer excuses for themselves when they come to die, than they were in the habit of making when they were in health. They know well how fatal it is for a sick man to be indulgent to himself. His friends are already running a risk of destroying him by their indulgence; he will be lost, if he is indulgent to himself. There is not a more universal characteristic of the saints, than their abhorrence of dispensations, growing as their need of them and right to them are growing also. Besides, the proximity of the intolerable purity of God, in which the dying lie, brings a light with it, in which little faults seem positively great ones. It is like faults in holy places or at holy times. A sense of sacrilege goes along with the other malice of the sin. To be greedy, for example, or to let a gust of anger make our voice shrill, when we are so awfully near God,—this is sad misery. When we stand round the beds of others, we rightly compassionate these things. When we lie there ourselves, and thus demean ourselves, our dispositions must rather be those of self-revenge than of compassion. In truth death is not a penance only; it is a humiliation also. We must bear as part of it this way in which the light of death illuminates the otherwise incredible frivolity of our serious immortal natures. Age has hidden our childishness; it has not changed it. Alas! years only took away the simplicity of youth; they abated little, if anything, of its childishness.



We have also to remember, in connection with the characteristic temptations of death, the especial assaults of the evil spirits which form perhaps an invariable part of the last struggle of every man. It is eminently the hour and the place of evil spirits, because it is also eminently the hour and the place of the divine compassions. But their assaults are not only more vehement and concentrated at that time, but are also of a kind peculiar to the occasion. This novelty springs from various causes; first of all, the evil spirits have reserved their worst attacks for the last, when the very novelty of them increases their likelihood of success, inasmuch as they take us by surprise, and out of the habits of our previous spiritual warfare. Then, again, there are temptations, which would hardly be temptations except to the dying, and these naturally make their first appearance at that time. Again, the operations of grace are frequently new in the sanctification of the dying; and the acuteness of the dark angels enables them to find new opportunities in new graces. Lastly, the vicinity of God gives a new force to all our motives, so that even old temptations come in a manner and with an intensity, which make them practically new. So far as we can judge from observation, it would not be true to say that the most vehement season of satanical assault in each man's life is his last battle on his dying bed. This is by no means the case. I should doubt if it were so even with the majority. But it is not unlikely to be so with a considerable number. It is at least one of the terrible capabilities of death. We ought all to expect what is not improbable, that the assaults of the evil spirits at the hour of death may be out of all proportion to the temptations of our life. It is better to be ready, even for what *may* happen, when the risk is so tremendous, and can be run only once.

What is particularly to be observed, and also to be dreaded, in these final assaults of the evil angels, is their



terrible fitness to our character. They are adapted to our weaknesses with almost inevitable skill. They are edged, proportioned, weighted, clothed, disguised, and surrounded with plausible circumstances, in such a manner that, if left to ourselves, we must perish. But the vilest of God's reasonable creatures is never so little left to himself as when he lies down to die. He is never so importuned by mercy, so almost cumbered with assistance, as he is then. If we did not always see death as if it were an island in an ocean of grace, we could not think without dismay of the horrible dexterity of our spiritual enemies. Moreover death brings out our character, and lays it open in its whole breadth to the machinations of our unseen foes. Indeed character is often brought out for the first time in its fullness and completeness by death. We sometimes see strange disclosures of this power in the deaths of children. Perhaps the souls of infants are as full-grown as those of mature men, only their material instrument, the body, is not equal to the task of their development. Certainly many children's deathbeds look as if this were the case. Thus the Church sings of dear St. Agnes, the little martyr of thirteen, *Infantia quidem computabatur in annis, sed erat senectus mentis immensa*. If it were so, would it not throw light on the mystery of baptism and its infused habits, and also invest children with a dignity which would influence us in their education? This may have been in the minds of those theologians, who held that children committed venial sins very early, and, dying in venial sin only, underwent a long purgatory because their parents never dreamed of their needing assistance.\* With adults, at all events,

\* Arriaga tom. 3. disp. 10. n. 53. Also the revelations of Elizabeth of Schonau lib. 2. cap. 18. Also the life of Marina d' Escobar ap Siurium. Tract vi. cap. 2. n. 12 and 13. And other writers who treat of the question of men dying in original and venial sin only.

there can be no doubt as to this amazing development of character by death, nor of the opportunity which it affords to the evil spirits. Nevertheless we must remember also that these assaults of the evil angels seldom last quite up to the act of death. Satan delivers his battle at a somewhat earlier period, and then is bidden to draw his forces off, and there is peace. The actual end of most men is in peace, however the battle may have gone.

Finally, we must say of the temptations of death, as we said of its pains, that there are doubtless unknown and unimaginable ones, which no man has ever returned to tell us of. Those, who have been raised to life again by the saints, do not seem to have been allowed to make revelations. Their experience had perhaps been intentionally withdrawn from their memory. What we can see for ourselves is this, and although it is but an outside, it is much to see, that souls, who have had small experience of spiritual things in lifetime, are often put through vast experiences in the rapid processes of death, which would have occupied years in the slower successiveness of life.

So far we have only spoken of the unilluminated side of death, or at least the light which has been thrown upon it is but like the redness of a sunset on a bare seaside. But, if death has its characteristic pains and temptations, it has also its characteristic graces and joys. We will begin by considering its graces. Grace, like all heavenly things, is given to concealment. Its simplicity loves disguise, and its beauty is almost of too delicate a nature to arrest the eye. Thus we shall not be surprised, if, while the pains and temptations of death stand out boldly and almost coarsely, the graces of death appear less prominent and occupy less room in the picture. There is one grace which seems to be hardly ever absent from Christian deathbeds. It is the grace of light. The intellectual self-sufficiency of the

world, impersonated in all its grandeur in Goethe, may need to cry out in piteous anguish for light, "more light." It was the natural death-song of the world-poet. But the humble believer is more likely to be bewildered with his light, than to need more. The stars grow brighter as the night darkens. As the lights of earth are put out one by one in the midnight of death, the countenance of heaven makes plainer and plainer revelations. From one point of view death is all darkness; from another it is a land of light. We see better than we did before. We understand better. We recognise more surely what has to be done, and we perceive how to do it. Our increased knowledge of the sinfulness of sin brings with it a deeper hatred of it, and a more satisfactory contrition. Our nearer view of God raises the fervour of our love. Faith seems almost to be changing its character, and begins to have something of sight in it, even while it continues to be strictly faith. We learn to judge ourselves beforehand with something of that searchingness, that remembrance, and that zealous purity, wherewith the All-holy is to judge us presently. Each doctrine of our faith, each mystery of our Blessed Lord, each saint and angel whom we have loved, shines out in the heaven above us like a new and magnificent luminary. Sometimes the light overflows the soul, whose profound recesses it has filled, and breaks out into actual sights, into flashes of celestial visions, into starry incursions of the impatient glory which is drawing the veil from behind, into sounds which scatter showers of light as they resound, into touches, tastes, and fragrances, which come to us in beams of light and make us give forth light ourselves. By means of all this light, common souls are often admitted then into the mystical world, who had in lifetime no antecedents whatever of the kind. It is true there are dark deaths, dark deaths which even saints have died, the aspect of whose magnificence was

all turned heavenward, so that we could not see it. But these are the rarest of deaths to the humble and penitent believer: and even then how glory-streaked is the darkness, how little like what we really mean by darkness, much more a pavilion of clouds in which the soul is invisibly caressed by God!

All grace brings with it a supernatural heat, but some graces in a much greater degree than others, and the same graces more efficaciously at some times than others. There are often graces in life, which seem to be nothing but illumination. They enlighten the mind without appearing to touch the affections. They illustrate our duty without fortifying the will to do it. They are dry graces. No dew falls with them. So that there appear to be graces which have no unction, but only make a cold bright day in the soul. Sometimes this separation between the light and heat of grace may be real. More often it comes to pass from the uncongenial state of our whole souls. A hard heart and a bright mind,—who has not felt the unhappiness of this, if he has ever tried the spiritual life at all? But the graces of death seem to bring with them great heat, which makes them more than usually efficacious. It is as if we were standing nearer, as in truth we are, to the fountain of all grace, the eternal fountain of divine fire. God's love of us looks as if it grew more pitiful, more mother-like, because of our extreme necessity. He pleads more, and threatens less. He entreats where He used to command. He kisses instead of speaking. He knows well that endearments have wrung confessions of guilt and sincere promises of amendment, from those whom no sternness, nor even pain, could have drawn to any such acknowledgment, much less inspire into them any such dispositions. The very circumstances of death league themselves auspiciously with this heat of grace. There is a pathos about everything, which melts ourselves,

as well as the bystanders. Our physical weakness brings a facility of weeping, which I cannot think is altogether without its influence in softening the heart; for what physical thing about us is *only* physical? Thus the most trivial motives of love and sorrow tell upon us with a new force. The tenderness which we so often see in the dying, the intensity of their natural affections deepening almost as their absorption in God deepens also, the courtesy of those who were naturally abrupt, the softness of those who were cold and unimpassioned in manner, the gracefulness of those whose goodness never did itself justice from the want of being graceful,—all these mellowings of character, these evening lights and shadows of the heart, which make us feel as if we had never adequately loved those whom we have most dearly loved, until they come to die, are the consequences and exuberances of that heat of grace which characterises a holy death.

There is a sense in which even the sacraments may be called characteristic graces of death. One of them, Extreme Unction, belongs of right to the act of dying, or to the proximate peril of it. But the same remark holds good of Confession, and the Viaticum. No one has ever yet fathomed the sacraments. We may confidently assert that a great residue of graces has escaped the penetration of the devoutest theologians. We can hardly magnify them overmuch. Alas! we must believe that not all sacraments administered to the dying are valid. The outward administration and the inward dispositions are not invariably conjoined. Nevertheless we cannot but believe that, on the whole, the administration of a sacrament is a strong probability in favour of its validity, strong enough to warrant that universal sense of the faithful, which leads them to think so hopefully of those who have died with the rites of the Church. It seems to belong to the providence of

God that it should be so. If the honour of Jesus be dear to us, the honour of the sacraments must be dear to us also; for in nothing is He so much implicated. Moreover, to the dying the special graces of the sacraments appear to become more special. We express this when we call the Communion of the dying by the wonderful title of Viaticum. Has any one, even the highest saint, ever taken out of any one sacrament the whole of the grace which it contained? Did any one ever in the longest life exhaust the treasures of his Baptism? It is the imperfection of our own dispositions, which puts limits to the sanctifying efficacy of the sacraments. But the dispositions of the dying are visibly quickened to a degree which amazes us, and are probably quickened in reality to an extent of which we have no conception, so that the sacraments sink into them like water in loose ground, and go down to an unusual depth.

The presence and assistance of our Lady, St. Joseph, the angels, and our patron saints, form a very world of grace, which is like an enchanted land. We have sounds from inside, and voices speaking, of such strange penetrating sweetness that they infold our spirits in wondering silence. We see light out of deep places, as it were the reflection of the lights of a great city on the swarthy clouds of night. The echoes of music come from afar, such music as must be to the dying like anticipations from heaven. Sometimes we neither hear nor see, but the dying themselves betray it in their broken talk, or we see it in their eyes like points of brightness without form or shape. Is there one of us, who does not expect to be in that world himself when he comes to die? Have not bargains passed between each of us and the inhabitants of heaven, in the fulfilment of which we put more trust than in the honestest contract upon earth? This supernatural thronging of celestial beings round our



deathbeds is another form of the love of God. It is full of graces ; but what those graces are, or like to what, we do not know. The time will come when it will all be matter of fact to us, and it will make death such a glory and a sweetness, that it will be one of the pleasures of eternity to be perpetually calling it to mind.

As we have said of the pains and temptations, so also must we say of the graces of death, that there are others unknown and unimaginable, peculiar graces out of God's reserved treasury, for such as have believed and have not presumed. At that hour and in that act, faith gathers exotic graces of strange, marvellous, many-sided virtue. For what is death to the believer, but the falling, and in all falls there is a risk, into the hands of the unknown goodness of our God ?

Last of all, we have to speak of the characteristic joys of death. This is a very interior world, into which we can hardly feel our way except by the actual sensibilities of death. Things are joys to the saints, which are not joys to us. Things are joys to us when we are more than commonly filled with the presence of God, which at ordinary times are not joys to us at all, perhaps even wearinesses. So doubtless there are many joys to the dying, which are joys to them because they are dying. As we approach death, if we approach it as Christians should, we begin to enter into the dispositions of the saints. God is more present to us perhaps than He has ever been in life, except on a few great occasions. Moreover, the joys of earth have faded from us. They have ceased to be joys. It is irksome to think of them now, both because they are so unsuitable to our present state, and also because they have at this distance a look of waywardness, and childishness, and indeed almost of sin. We are more sensitive therefore to the touch of supernatural joy. For example, there belongs to our con-



dition a partial inability to sin. There are many sins which we can no longer commit, and many which we have no temptation to commit. This is like a faint beginning of heaven. It is enough to be a joy to us, that the mere possibilities of sin are on the move, that any capability of offending God has become dead already. It cheers us on. It melts our hearts. It is a fresh spring of love within us. To be unable to offend God again, is part of a saint's desire of heaven. It comes near to disinterested love.

The past also, that fearful, fertile past, out of which we have seen all manner of chilling fears come forth, like clouds rolling in from the sea,—it will become like a spice-island breathing its aromatic odours over the deep. Two things particularly in our past will give us joy. The first is our fear of God. The more of fear in life, the more of joy in death. O it is a happy thing to have feared God, to have feared Him exceedingly! It is at the last as if we had paid Him some fixed amount, and had to pay no more, of the tribute of our fear, that clinging fear which, without ceasing to be fear, is a height of love as well, and as if now fear could be fear no longer, but glided into familiarity. Every tremour of fear, which we have felt in life, seems to have earned a thrill of joy for us when we come to die. To love God is the beginning, middle, and end of all things. Yet somehow fear is sweeter to us in the retrospect than love. Boldness frightens us when we come to die; and fear we see then was the wise humility of love. If we would die sweetly, let us fear God exceedingly. They who have lived lives of fear, are the likeliest to die deaths of ecstatic love.

The other thing in our past, which is now a source of jubilee, is the confidence we have placed in God. That we have trusted Him, that we have trusted no one but Him, that especially we have not trusted ourselves, that we have

tried to trust Him always and utterly, this it is which makes our soul sing songs in death, which might stop the world to listen, and ravish the spirits of the angels. We have known no reckonings up of merits. We have gloried in grace. We have dwelt on the sounding shores of the sea of the Precious Blood. We have thought great things of God's goodness. We have not known what it was to doubt His fidelity, or to demur to His decrees. We have flung ourselves under the march of His sovereignty. We have abandoned ourselves to His grandeur. We have loved the darkness of His ways, and begged Him not, in condescension to any weakness of ours, to destroy by indulgent brightness, the beauty of His night. So we have gone through life, while life was an unusual problem to us, so incurably full of joy, and yet so wearifully devoid of interest. It was always morning with us, morning in youth, morning in middle life, morning when middle life was past. All our life was morning. We loved its brightness; but we wanted rest, and joy was not restful. We saw that with others it was evening early in life. How tranquil they seem! we used to say. Will it ever be evening-time with us? As God wills, so only it be never night, the night in which no man could work; for at least there is no rest, no Sabbath there! Thus we have lived lives without doubts, without questions, without strong wills, lives of confidence in God, a confidence so intimately part of ourselves that we have almost doubted whether it were natural or supernatural, swift, gushing lives, helplessly jubilant, almost persecuted by our own joy. This is what comes of confidence in God. But confidence and fear are almost one thing rather than two, when we speak of God. He that fears most, trusts most. He that trusts most, fears most. To none is death so little of a change, as to those whose life has been one long unbroken confidence in God.

Thus the present is a joy to us in our partial inability to sin, and the past is a joy to us in its retrospect of confidence and fear. Then there is another joy, which is partly of the present, and partly of the past. In our past lives we may have had many external faults. They might not be greatly culpable in the sight of God, but they were very offensive to others, and particularly discomfoting to ourselves. We were beset with them, and nothing that we could do to cure them seemed to make any impression upon them. Whether God allowed them in order to keep us humble, by hiding our gifts from ourselves as well as from others, we cannot tell. All we know is that they were a disagreeable cloud round us, and a standing shame, which led us to despise ourselves. They were often sins; but they were always littlenesses, even when they were not sins. Now suddenly they are gone, vanished, burned away in some insensible fire. It is not merely that the outward opportunities of them are lacking to us. We feel that the things deep down in our character, which represented these faults, and were evidences of them, shadows cast by them, are gone also, and gone without warning, gone at once. We see this often in the deaths of the young. Death seems to do for them at once, what years of struggle would have failed to do. There is in them such an unclothing of faults, such a winning maturity of purified age. We could not have thought so much beauty of character could have comported with such external faults. But what a lesson is this to the living as well as a joy to the dying! What a world of the unsuspected truths of charity, and mysterious accuracies of ingeniously kind interpretations of conduct, does it not open out before us! It is as if purgatory were visibly doing its work in the soul, while it yet lived on earth, so passive does the operation seem, and yet performed with

such amazing swiftness as belongs not to the slow imperceptible action of those unmeritorious fires.

The future too brings troops of joys, like angelic bands, to the dying bed. There is a joy which has to do with the present, yet lies on the confines of the future, and whose blessedness the past enhances as it were by contrast. It is the actual nearness of God. It is no slight bliss for one, whose spiritual life in years gone by has always taken the form of the worship of God's sovereignty, to find himself sensibly in the grasp of that resistless power. He trembles with exceeding fear. How can it be otherwise, with the nervous, puny, fragile creature, in so great a Hand, and with the fingers actually closing over him? Yet in his fear there is a breathless joy. He is on the verge now of learning by experience, that which hitherto has been but a sweet faith, how the omnipotence of God is the measure of His goodness. Through life he has been pushing his way to God, and the distance made him faint and downhearted. Now he is close to his attainment. All things round him are vibrating, because of the extreme vicinity of God. The strong earth is being unanchored, and is drifting away from under him, and underneath all is God. There is a trouble as of a coming earthquake, but it is in truth the approach of God. He comes as if He came from far, as if He were in haste, and must be gone again presently, and we feel His breath upon us in the dark, and in another moment He will have carried us away, almost into the distance of immensity, and we shall have found a home somewhere in His illimitable power.

Then our joy becomes still more a thing of the future. We rejoice in the future hope of eternal company with Jesus. We do not distinguish among the various blessednesses of heaven. We see it all in indistinct unity, as contemplative souls see God in contemplation. Heaven is one

thing,—to be eternally with Jesus. We thought we had already had a great devotion to the Sacred Humanity in our lifetime; but then we find we have hardly known its sweetness, its loveliness, its dearness. Just as, when death beautifies the characters of those we love, we feel as if we had never known them before as they deserved, and as if till now we never suspected how much we should have to lose in losing them; so now the beauty of Jesus grows upon us like a glorious dawn; and though we have desired Him and thirsted for Him all our lives, it is as if we had never known till now how much we were to gain in gaining Him. Words cannot tell the novelty of Jesus to the dying. The joy of that novelty, what less can it be than part of the eternal amazement of our happy souls in heaven?

Then, last of all, there is a joy in death itself, which we cannot understand, because it is out of sight, an unexperienced joy. We know it from the dying. Perhaps there is some sweetness in the act of dying, heretofore unimagined, and coming to it from the fact that our Blessed Lord has died. Or perhaps it is a joy to us to find death all so much gentler than we had expected. Those last words of the great theologian, Suarez, always touch me deeply, when he looked up at the very last, and said, as if in some gratified surprise, "I never thought it was so sweet to die!" We think of those twenty-one closely-printed, double-columned folios, diffusive, exuberant, and full of unction, filled to overflowing with deep, and calm, and wise, and many-sided thoughts of God and of the things of God. But one thought was not there, that should have been, one of deepest significance to men to know, and yet he had not attained thereto, one thought, unthought then, but of deeper significance than thousands of his others which we could ill spare, the one which was to be his last thought, and the crown of all his thoughts, his mind as he took the

first step into eternity,—“I never thought it was so sweet to die!”

The poets, then, were not so far wrong in their images of death. The summer sun shining on those motionless green billows of the grassy graveyard, the fragrance of the lime-flowers tranquilly depending in the windless air, the under-song of the bees in the blossoms, the quiet sky overhead so blue, and the spire pointing its untired finger up to the Throne of God, so softly curtained in the infinity of that yielding blue! These outward images were not without their inward truth for those who die their deaths well by dying them in Christ. Deaths are being died somewhere every moment. But it is not a melancholy thought. Every hour, we feel it most at evening, it is like balm to our spirits to think of the busy benevolence of death, ending so much pain, crowning so much virtue, swallowing up so much misery, pacifying so much strife, illuminating so much darkness, letting so many exiles into their eternal home and to the land of their Eternal Father! O grave and pleasant cheer of death! How it softens our hearts, and without pain kills the spirit of the world within our hearts! It draws us towards God, filling us with strength, and banishing our fears, and sanctifying us by the pathos of its sweetness. When we are weary, and hemmed in by life, close and hot and crowded, when we are in strife, and self-dissatisfied, we have only to look out in our imagination over wood and hill, and sunny earth, and starlit mountains, and the broad seas whose blue waters are jewelled with bright islands, and rest ourselves on the sweet thought of the diligent, ubiquitous benignity of death!



*ON DEATH.*

## III.

## PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

LIFE, as no one can doubt, is more important than death. If death has a great influence on life, the influence of life on death is still greater. In fact the work of death can only be done safely in life. There are exceptions, to show how God can stretch His mercy, and also to magnify the efficacy of grace. But as the good life is worth nothing, so far as eternity is concerned, unless it is crowned by a good death, so a good death, though not impossible, is the exception where the life has not been good. Still, though an exception, it is possible, and therefore from one point of view we may say that death looks more important than life. Nevertheless it may only be a seeming; for who knows whether some good thing among much evil, something striven for and clung to, even where there appeared no signs of strife, may not be the secret cause of those prodigious interventions of grace, which occur sometimes in the deaths of sinners? Perhaps also such interventions have never happened to those who presumed upon them beforehand, and deliberately delayed turning to God through a profane confidence in the graces and opportunities of death. But the practical truth is that which teaches us at once the



most sober and solemn view of life, that every single thing we do is actually making death either harder or easier.

Death, therefore, is not an isolated action. Time and eternity are rivetted in it. Life is not secured without it. Eternity is ratified by it. This is obvious; for death is at once a part both of life and immortality. Yet men often speak as if preparation for death were a distinct spiritual exercise, and nothing more than that. They know of course that all life is a necessary preparation for death, but they do not realise it. They answer rightly when they are questioned, but the truth does not always rest clearly in their minds. Whether we think of death, or whether we forget it, whether we serve God, or neglect Him, life, in spite of us, is all the while a minute and detailed preparation for death. It seems almost absurd to dwell upon what is so plain. Nevertheless the too exclusive regarding of preparation for death as a distinct spiritual exercise is productive of much harm.

Whatever habits of thought tend to make death appear a thing by itself, a detached act, tend also to make strictness of life seem less needful. Insensibly, even men who are not sinners come to lay too much stress on death and to consider it as a process for straightening crooked lives. They would shrink with horror from saying that a good death would do instead of a good life. Yet practically an idea with something of a similar spirit grows up in their minds, and lowers their standard of holiness, and lulls their vigilance, and relaxes their concentrated attention to the details of conscience. The very love of God helps to deceive them, when they have thus once begun to deceive themselves. The immensity of His graces in death, the wonders of His sacraments, the intervening jurisdiction of His blessed Mother, and the authentic conversion of great sinners at that eleventh hour, throw a glory of its own

round death, which cannot be denied, but which on the contrary our reverence must sedulously magnify as one of the characteristic abysses of the divine compassion. Rightly viewed, it is an incentive to greater strictness. Nothing makes strictness more attractive, or more imperative, than the evidences of God's love. In proportion as we love Him, we fear His justice. In proportion as we love Him, we appreciate His sanctity. But we know that there is no corruption more pestilent, than the corruption of that which is most excellent; and thus it comes to pass, that the malice of men has always found in the greatness of God's love a motive for presumption. But is the love less true? Or is it meant that we are to shut our eyes to it? Or are we to become unreal, and put away from our practice doctrines which belong to the theory of the faith? Is not all doctrine practical? Is it not the first use of dogmatic theology to be the basis of sanctity, while controversy is but its fiftieth or its hundredth use? He, who separates dogmatics from ascetics, seems to assert this proposition. The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ was not meant primarily to make us holy,—or this other maxim, that Holiness has no necessary dependence upon orthodoxy. While, therefore, we urge upon men the influence of life on death, we must not go too far, nor put out of view those signal graces by which God appears sometimes to contradict our teaching. As I said before, Rightly viewed, they are incentives to strictness, not pretexts for presumption. There may be excuses for inadvertent souls, of which in our narrowness we have no idea, and to them the extraordinary graces of death may come. But we are in the light of the Holy Ghost, under the empire of grace, with a conscious inward life, and more or less of sweet experience of God, what have we to do with those strange awakening graces at the last? They will cheer us in our

present penances: but they will throw no soft hopeful shadows over our present negligence.

All life then is a preparation for death, whether we think of it or not, quite independently of any intention of our own; a preparation as ceaseless and inevitable as the currents of thought, speech, and action, which, noisily or silently, are flowing from us at all hours. There are thus three kinds of preparation for death. The first is the entire series of life, which is actually and efficaciously preparing for us, according to common rules, the sort of death we are to die. Everything we do will turn round and face us at the last, as well as follow us over the grave to judgment. Of this preparation we have said enough. The second is the conscious and intentional fashioning of our lives generally, with a view to death, with a deliberate reference to its last end; and the third is what we may call the special preparation for death consisting of particular spiritual exercises, retreats, and penances, which have death for their exclusive object. Something more remains to be said of the second, or general preparation for death, before we can consider the third, or special, preparation.

It is the way of worldly people to make too little of death. The bravery of life seems to them a nobler thing. It is a greater power, and power is the object of their admiration. It is the genius of literature to abhor the imagery of death. The thought of death tends to make men timorous, and selfish, and little. There is an amount of truth in all this. There is a certain want of grandeur in religious details. Spirituality keeps us sorely down among our corruptions. A positive precept seldom has an imposing aspect, and obedience to it will often look trivial and unworthy. Nevertheless preparation for death can hardly avoid being one of the occupations of life, and an occupation stretching over a great deal of its surface. Death is an

unknown act. It happens only once. It is inevitable and necessary. There is a universal uncertainty in everything connected with it. Yet everything is infallibly fixed by it to all eternity. These are the commonplaces of death ; and every one of them is a sufficiently cogent argument for the wisdom of making all life a general preparation for death. It is plain our preparation must be general as well as special, remote as well as proximate. To make all life a special and proximate preparation for death would, in most cases, be not only unpractical, but incompatible with the highest purposes of life. Yet a conscious general preparation should be lifelong and unintermitting.

There are degrees in this general preparation. In some souls it occupies more room than in others. This may depend upon natural disposition, or it may depend upon a peculiar attraction of grace, or it may depend upon the degree to which providence has encompassed our lot in life with unbroken or successive sorrows. Certainly with some, this lifelong preparation for death becomes the peculiar form of their whole spiritual life. When this arises either from natural character or from besetting sorrow, it ought to be altogether disallowed. It is not an authentic spirituality. It plays into the hands of sentimentality. It degenerates into mere moody, luxurious, self-indulgent dramatising of what is far too serious to be played with as a depth of feeling or an interesting pathos. There are very few, to whom such a form of devotion is at all suitable ; and while the characteristic of it, where it is the instinct of grace, is its safety, on the other hand its peculiarity, as a growth of disposition or a consequence of sorrow, is precisely its unsafeness. No one therefore must choose it for himself as the one form of his whole spiritual life. When self-chosen, it is most likely to prove a delusion leading to laxity by unmanning us for all real penance. There is no vigour in

uncheerful penance, no cheerfulness in penances which nature seeks, and no penance at all in the indulgence of heaviness and gloom.

But there are some whom the Holy Ghost seems to call to this manner of the spiritual life. They are mostly souls of a grave cheerfulness, often with a natural turn for humour, and distinguished by active habits rather than contemplative. The spirit which is formed in them leads them to rest long, often for their whole lives, in the exercises of the purgative way, even when the deepest part of their soul is in the unitive. It is perhaps this tendency which makes such a form of spirituality so peculiarly safe, and as exempt, as any fashion of spirituality can be, from the entanglements and mockeries of delusion. It leads men also to make much of faith, of the gift of faith, and of the common things of the faith. This is not only another source of safety, but it also forms in us a childlike spirit, which is an earnest of many graces, of the higher as well as of the lowlier sort. Finally, this method of spirituality causes us peculiarly to cultivate the fear of God, and to find large room and free space for our souls in the exercise of the examination of conscience. For examination of conscience, where it ministers to liberty of spirit, which it is far from doing in all cases, is one of those compendious spiritual exercises which of itself can make saints. There is plainly a gravity, a solidity, a security, about this form of the spiritual life, which is much to be admired. Nevertheless we must remember, that all this is only true of it, when it is a genuine attraction of grace, a vocation and not a choice.

We shall best understand in what particulars the general preparation for death consists, by drawing a picture of the kind of life which usually meets its punishment upon the deathbed, and in the penal regions beyond. We need not speak of a life of open sin, whether of rebellion against God,

or of worldly inadvertence of Him. Such a life speaks for itself, tells its own tale, explains itself, and is intelligible at first sight. We will take a life which is a very ordinary type, a life of considerable efforts after good, of decent frequentation of the sacraments, of an unevenly conscientious discharge of relative duties, of very rare mortal sin, and of a struggle to keep in a state of grace, which, if not unintermitting, is at least the rule rather than the exception. We may hope that such a life will end in salvation. We cannot do more than hope, but we have great grounds for hope. This life must be our lowest type. But there are other types which improve upon this, some more and some less; and all these we may include in our description. Now there are sundry features in these lives which are visible foreshadowings of trouble at the last, of disconsolate deathbeds. In truth, we the survivors should have need to be disconsolate if such lives ended without trouble, or issued in undoubting calm, and, still more, if they ended in triumphant assurance. Each of the lives will not present all the aspects; it is enough if it has some one or more of them.

The first thing we observe in such men is their lukewarmness. Lukewarmness is a thing which has many degrees, ranging from nearly hot to nearly cold; and the men we are speaking of are generally in some one of these intermediate degrees. They have their seasons of fervour. Who has not? But their own acknowledgment about themselves is, that, as a rule, they are tepid, below the mark in devotion and practice, more or less annoyed by religion, making themselves much at home in the world, and feeling, in spite of a higher feeling, that, after all, supernatural things are but an inevitable intrusion. These feelings do not in themselves constitute lukewarmness; but they do constitute it when unresisted, and unfought against. It is not, however, necessary to be at our ease under them in order to be luke-



warm ; it is sufficient that we succumb, however uneasily, and succumb for some considerable length of time. Uneasiness is no consoling proof that we are not really lukewarm. Then again, such men are careless with the sacraments. They make but a perfunctory preparation for confession. Their examination of conscience is hardly adequate, and, which is a more serious matter, they take but little pains with their sorrow, and less with their purpose of amendment. Sorrow for venial sins requires a good deal of looking after. Besides this, they make little, if any, preparation for communion, and that little is of a formal and spiritless kind ; and the character of the thanksgiving is the same as that of the preparation.

Furthermore, these men are much given to wasting time. Wasting time is the fault of almost numberless varieties of lives. Nearly every man has his own way of wasting time. Idling, dawdling, frittering, gossiping, dreaming, procrastinating, sleeping, recreating, playing with our work, trivial activity, these are only some of the commoner forms of wasting time. Yet wasted time is a vengeful thing, and stings terribly at the last. It diminishes the chances of a successful end. The less criminal forms of worldliness find acceptance also in the lives we are considering ; and worldliness is at the least spirit-wasting in the forms in which it is most innocent, if indeed in any form it be innocent at all. Changeableness in devotions, and a general want of system in the spiritual life, is another characteristic of these lives. Many things may be said of this ; but it is only our business now to enumerate it as one of the things which strew death-beds with thorns. Selfishness, and want of almsgiving, and that common fault of self-willed eccentricity in almsgiving, these also disquiet men at last, disquiet them when they are almost sickening with the desire of peace. Last of all, there is a want of penance in such lives, which is laying up terrible

things for the end. Some time or other, penance will find us out. He is truly an unhappy man whom it finds out for the first time at the last. Under the head of penance we should specially include the keen appreciation and habitual indulgence in very little bodily comforts, the having many things in the day which are half necessary to us, and the absence of which ruffles and deranges us. He that is a slave to lilliputian comforts will find a giant behind the curtains of his deathbed, who is not unlikely to strangle him in the weakness of that hour of retribution.

Now a life the opposite to all this is what may be termed a life of general preparation for death, a life which has avoided on the whole these seven things, lukewarmness, careless sacraments, waste of time, worldliness, changeableness in devotions, selfish scantiness of almsgiving, and want of penance. These are the seven prophecies of unquiet and distressing deaths, deaths that *may* end well, but deaths that run fearful risks in coming to their end. To hang the whole weight of our eternity over the precipice of death is not courage : it is madness.

If the material world is beautiful for its wisdom and its power, the spiritual world is yet more beautiful for its mercy and its compassion. But there are some mysteries, which are apparently exceptions to this rule of predominant mercy, mysteries of vindictive justice, not the less full of the shining of the Divine Perfections, but which we cannot admire with the same peace, because they overawe our souls. To feed undismayed upon the beauty of God's justice is a bliss reserved for another state. Our fear for ourselves and our love for others alike impede the full course of that heavenly joy in our present condition. Yet we must not omit to study these mysteries of justice merely because they are so full of doubt and fear. In truth, the fear of God can be seldom abused so as to do us grievous

harm, and almost all of us stand more in need of fear than of love, though our need of both of them is sadly great. We shall be least secure against these visitations happening to ourselves if we wilfully refuse to contemplate them. The terrible mystery, at which I am now hinting, is the bad deaths of those who have once been good, and good for the greater part of their lives, sometimes good almost up to the end. Theophilus Raynaudus has a treatise in his works with the hideous title of "A bad death after a good life." It proves to be a commentary on the history of Judas. Now this is a phenomenon in the science of death, which we must needs consider. Mercy has its good deaths after bad lives, its deathbed repentances, its snatching of great sinners out of the very jaws of the fire, those sudden and to our eyes capricious interventions of grace which seem to encourage the presumption of inconsiderate beholders, but which, to the eye of reverent faith, one while magnify the sovereignty of grace, another while illustrate the empire of the Mother of God, another while illuminate the grandeur of the gift of faith, or yet another while light up as by a flash the incredible abysses of the divine compassion and predestination. So in like manner the jealousy of God, the sharpness of His vindictive justice, have these bad deaths which follow lives of so much good. We must now enquire into these terrific manifestations.

First of all, it is obvious to remark that these lives have been seemingly good rather than really good. Judas, they say, had a secret fault corroding all his life, and this is a sufficient explanation of his awful fall. I fear the matter is not so easily settled as this. No one surely can doubt of Judas having had a true vocation to the apostleship, considering that our Lord Himself called him, and conferred that office upon him. Yet it was a dignity and a grace unequalled, except by the Divine Maternity, the wardenship

of St. Joseph, and perhaps the office of the Precursor. What gifts and virtues, what inward beauties and rare heroisms, are not implied in this vocation to be one of the Incarnate Word's selected twelve! Yet how terrible the end! Again, it may be urged that this is only saying, that a good life without perseverance is unavailing. Only saying! But, alas! how many say this, and do not realise the tremendous doctrine it contains! A man may give up all that is bright and attractive in the world. He may wed himself to the almost insufferably dull work of the priesthood, a work of unintermitting toil, of predominating failure, of unthanked weariness, of responsibilities so many and so hard that they are for ever accumulating sin, and full of possibilities and occasions of falling, from which he would otherwise have been free. He may persevere in this course blamelessly, mark the word, blamelessly, for fifty years, the jubilee of his priesthood; and then he may fall, and death leap out of its ambush upon him while he is fallen, and behold! he is the hopeless victim of eternal ruin. We need not say more of this, than that it is a theological possibility. It is enough that it is so much as that. Certain appalling revelations of the saints make it more than this. They give names and dates, and speak of facts; and their look of authenticity is intolerable. It is more than curious, too, that intellectual wisdom should have been the distinguishing gift of some of those examples, which history puts before us, of deaths that look so nearly hopeless that we cannot think of them without dismay. Witness Solomon, Tertullian, Origen, and Hosius, those startling monuments which mercy has bidden justice raise in sight of the wayfarers of the earth. It may also be said, and we cling to the thought, that sometimes these deaths are temporal and not eternal punishments, as with the man of God in the Old Testament, whom the lion devoured. There are some probabilities, and

an asserted vision, of Solomon's salvation; and Benedict XIV. tells us that no one's perdition seems undeniably predicted in Scripture, so as to come near being a matter of faith, except that of Saul.

Nevertheless, when we have made the best of it, what remains is horrible enough. The mere fact that such deaths are theological possibilities, that it does not belong, as far as we can see, to the providence of God to hinder them, and that the saints speak of such deaths as having actually happened, is full of teaching, which we had better learn. Our eternity depends on the state in which we are when we die. Thus, the words are great words to say, a bad life with a good death is secure, while a good life with a bad death is perdition. The hour of death, its time, manner, and circumstances, form one of the most, perhaps positively the most, decisive of God's providences upon us. I should not have dared to say this, was I not confident that in what has gone before I have guarded against the possibility of false consequences being deduced from it. We can hardly conceive that these bad deaths after good lives are common; but we are left in uneasy ignorance as to how common they may be. It is true we knew beforehand that we were to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear. It is true we know that such a death must be altogether our own fault in not corresponding to grace. Every man has far more, not only more but far more, grace given him than is enough to save him. Nevertheless a fearful mystery is involved in so dire a dispensation, whichever of the three classes of persons, to whom it may happen, we regard. Look at men who have been really mortified and good for years, and have not persevered, or at men who have been under delusions all along, and have come at last not to be able to distinguish between delusions and the truth, or again at men who have begun well, and who have not more

than an unquiet suspicion that they have got into a rut of slovenliness, of tepidity, of formal sacraments, of infrequent prayer, and of taking liberties with God; and lo! they have not strength to fight through the last hours, and to hold on to the edge of heaven, but fall fluttering into the sheer abyss. We live in a world which has such things among its phenomena. Surely we are fools, if our lives are not such as to take these things into account.

But these awful visitations have their roots and origin in our own conduct. What has been described above as general preparation for death would infallibly secure us against them. If we could be allowed to see one of these startling deaths with all its antecedents laid bare, so that we might trace its fibres and ramifications, we should see how one of them began on one day under certain circumstances, and another on another day at such and such a place and in the company of such and such a friend. These were little indistinguishable beginnings, thread-like, feeble, turned aside by the least obstacle, which an ejaculation would have withered or an absolution snapped, and behold! now they are huge roots of death! They were not watched; they were not checked. Here is a carelessness about little things, which began one summer holyday years ago. Here is an interruption of examination of conscience, which took place in an illness, and the practice was not resumed afterwards, and hence a want of self-knowledge. Here we came out of a trial, and brought with us a shadow of a spirit of self-trust, and it has waxed to something colossal, something like the sin of Lucifer. There was an enjoyable time at the seaside with a large circle of free conversation, and there we slipped into a habit of criticising others, and hence these mortal sins against charity. It often struck us, as we read books, to pray especially for the gift of final perseverance. But we never did so. How were we to know that that



transient thought was an angel's bidding, or a pleading of the Holy Ghost? Yet who can tell the irreverence of making sure of one of God's greatest gifts, without so much as taking the trouble specially to ask for it? We have been fostering some secret fault, like Judas. But its beginnings were in an unworthiness, which was hardly sin. We knew we had better not do it, and we did it. How few persons think themselves at all covetous! Yet surely more than half of those, who live in the world, have some tendrils of that subtle idolatry twining round their hearts. It is one of those vices of which the unlikeliest-looking souls are often the likeliest to be guilty. Insensibly we have acquired the habit of taking our own advice and acting on our own opinion. Who could have believed that the things should have come of it, which have come of it? We have thought,—alas! how many rich people seem to think so,—that almsgiving was a counsel, and not a precept; and mercy now is absent from the last end of those, from whose lives works of mercy have been absent. Who thinks himself a hypocrite? Surely we have not been hypocrites. Yet all through life we have been deficient in thorough sincerity with God. So the divine mercy is wandering somewhere over the earth, or is perhaps lingering somewhere with the head of some dying lifelong sinner in its lap, and is not here, where we are dying; indeed it is almost everywhere but here,—ubiquitous, yet not including in its ubiquity the death-chamber of us who once served God, who once had spiritual sweetnesses, who once were encompassed with the softly-glowing signs of predestination, and who now are dying, and are going whither we have unfortunately made too sure that we could never go! From all this, general preparation for death would have saved us. Light is a responsibility. The brighter our light, the deeper is the darkness which our light will make, if we

turn it into darkness. It is the old, the simple, and the sufficient truth,—if we do not take pains, and great pains, and persevering pains, there will be cruel darkness round us in the hour when we shall most need light.

We have still to consider what is called special preparation for death. This is one of the most satisfactory predictions of final perseverance; and has always entered deeply into the spiritual life of holy men. This special preparation consists of a variety of pious exercises having a direct reference to death, and to the obtaining the grace of dying holily. First of all, it is obvious that this must be the subject of special prayer. There are few prayers which may be unconditional. St. Philip used to say there was only one prayer that he always made without any condition—it was that unborn children might live to come to the grace of baptism. In like manner we may pray unconditionally to die in the faith and fear of God. We may do so, because death is so great an act, because it is certain to be God's will it should be well done, and because the Church teaches us so to do. Every Hail Mary contains a prayer for a good death, and among other things included in the final petition of our Lord's Prayer, who can doubt but that a good death is not among the least significant? It would not be hard to show that each separate petition of the Our Father is in itself a prayer for a holy death. If final perseverance is a grace apart, and not merely the last link of a chain, which happens to come last in order of time, and if it is a grace we cannot merit, it must necessarily be part of the fear of God to make such perseverance the subject of daily and special prayer.

There are also certain outward practices, which saintly men have been in the habit of using for this end. Among these we may enumerate some act or ejaculation on lying down to rest, which is the daily similitude of death, formal

acts of acceptance of death as a divine penance, made from time to time, meditation on the Four Last Things, and an occasional day's retreat for this express purpose. One of these practices I would venture emphatically to recommend. It is the frequent repetition of the Acts of the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, with great attention paid to the exciting of the requisite interior dispositions along with the orthodox form of words. To these should be added Acts of contrition. We are apt to acquit ourselves with a sort of facile formality of that which we do so often that it comes to be almost mechanically done. This is the chief difficulty in saying the Divine Office. Portions of it slip off our tongues more swiftly almost than thought, so that it speeds away like the unnoticed sand in the hourglass, less under our control than we should wish it to be. These Acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition have *visibly* a special power at death. To one used to them in life, and not used to them as a mere fragment of catechism, they are next door to priest and sacraments. If we trust to them as mere fractions of catechism they will be worse than unhelpful. The thing to be aimed at is the habitual advertence to the interior dispositions at the time when we pronounce the words.

There are some practices mentioned in spiritual books, which at the least cannot be universally or indiscriminately recommended. They are such as these: laying ourselves out in bed like corpses for a few moments, assisting in spirit at our own funeral, going mentally through the ceremony of our own Extreme Unction. Souls are so very different, that we can never say of anything which a good man has recommended, that it will not be good for other souls. We cannot too often remember that the only approach to a general rule in spiritual direction is, that there is no general rule in the matter. Rules, which seem

the most general, are no more than approximations. But I confess my instincts are against these dramatic representations. I should be afraid of their turning into sentimentality, and of men being made unreal by thus playing at death. Death surely has empire enough over the imagination. It is something else than the imagination which needs kindling, in connection with that dread mystery. I say this diffidently ; for Bellecius strongly recommends some practices of this kind. For myself, I found that they distracted me from the thought of God, and did not make me serious. Yet Bellecius is especially a solid writer.

We considered, at the beginning of this Conference, that form of the spiritual life, which resolves itself wholly into preparation for death. There is something akin to this in special preparation for death. Besides formal practices for this end, we may dwell upon certain parts of the spiritual life, and give them a certain degree of prominence, with a particular reference to death. But these things neither occupy the whole breadth of our spirituality, nor are unintermitting exercises. We allow a special reference to death to impart certain characteristics to our spirituality. One of these is that recommended in Scripture, To be always afraid of forgiven sin. This gives a great solidity to virtue. Abiding sorrow for sin is one of the safest grandeurs of holy souls. A single caution may be required. This sorrow should be for the most part general, not too much descending into particulars, for fear of scruples which always make the will languid. There is something very satisfactory about a soul which is characterised by this fear of forgiven sin. Another interior practice is, making death a light to live by, or, in other words, doing everything as we shall wish to have done it when we come to die. This exercises a salutary influence over our examinations of conscience, and our preparations for confession. We perform these

duties each time as if it was to be the last time. Things done in that spirit are for the most part done well. In like manner other parts of the spiritual life may be made to bear especially on death. The rule to be observed is briefly this,—to dwell on whatever leads us to make less of the physical terror of dying, and more of whatever renders death transparent and shows us God beyond. We may lawfully be afraid to die because it is a punishment: but it would be better if we could fear it exclusively as settling for ever our relationship to God.

Then again there are certain things which it is devout to do for a hundred other reasons, but which have a special virtue with regard to death. In proportion as we fear death, we shall naturally lay stress on these things, and give them a prominence in our practice. For instance, it is obvious that charity to the dying, praying daily for those who are in their agony all the world over, and performing personal works of mercy to them when it is in our power, are special preparations for our own death. Blessings beget their own kind of blessings. In natural things one kindness brings a like kindness. Still more in divine things do blessings roam the world in groups and families, making much of their own kindred. The same may be said of charity to the souls in purgatory, especially by self-sacrificing generosity in the matter of Indulgences. There is something in both these devotions, which is congenial to a happy and a holy death.

Lastly, there are two things which are still more special in the way of preparation for death. The first is an habitual looking to the Most Holy Mother of God as having a very peculiar and distinct jurisdiction over deathbeds. The Church points this out to us again and again, in hymns and antiphons, as well as in the Hail Mary. The revelations of the saints, the teaching of devotional writers, and

the universal sense of the faithful, unite in proclaiming the power which God has given her in this particular respect. Some have spoken of it as the reward which Jesus has bestowed upon her for her heroic presence with her broken heart on Calvary. Others have said that it belonged to her as queen of mercy, because the hour of death is so wonderfully mercy's hour. All agree that deathbeds form a department of the Church, if we may speak so familiarly, which belongs to her officially. We should therefore be out of harmony with the Church, if this consideration did not practically enter into our devotion to our Blessed Lady. The experience of all, who grow in holiness, is that they grow also in tenderest devotion and deepest reverence for our Blessed Mother. We are always learning her anew, and so beginning to love her, as if what we had felt for her before was hardly worthy of the name of love. As the rest of our devotion to her grows, so also must our dependence on her aid in our last hour grow within our hearts. We shall pray to her more fervently about it. We shall make compacts with her, to which we shall assume her consent, that either by herself or by her angels she will fortify us by her presence at that dread moment. We shall entrust our fears to her, and leave to the management of her maternal solicitude every one of those circumstances of death, the very least detail of which is to us of such surpassing interest.

The second thing I alluded to is perpetual thanksgiving for the death of Christ. All holy deaths come out of His. If He had not died, how should we dare to die? He is the Creator. He invented the punishment of death. He also must suffer it. It was His own law of love. He has enlarged the gates of death, and hung lamps over them. It is strange how the elder saints dared to die. No wonder they speak of it so awfully, as if it led into such terrible darkness, and looked like an end of all things, almost like an



extinguishing of immortality. Great was their faith, these old patriarchs, kings, and prophets. But how different is death to us! Christ has died. A new creation were surely a less change. As death was the peculiar punishment invented by God for sin, so was the death of our Lord, precisely His death and nothing else, the peculiar price exacted by the Father for the redemption of the world. Thus the death of Jesus is the life of every one of us. We live because He died. How marked a feature, then, in all our prayer, must be thanksgiving for the death of Christ! It must be, if such a thing could be, the universal special devotion of all Christians. Moreover it was by His death that we succeeded to His Mother, as our inheritance. Thus the death of Jesus is entwined with our deaths. Thanksgiving for His Death is the best prayer for our own. As the Father fixed precisely on His death as the price of our salvation, so must our devotion fix precisely on His death, as the object of our love and praise.

We have said enough of preparation for death. Men's faces looking into a sunset are golden; so are our lives when they look always into the countenance of coming death.

## ON DEATH.

## IV.

## A DEATH PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

THE union of fear and desire is a beautiful worship, modestly befitting the creature, and reaching with venturous reverence to the perfections of the Most High. To have no fear of God is to be, not only without love of Him, but without knowledge of Him also. To be without the desire of God would be almost worse than to rise against Him through despair of reaching him, as the reprobate do in their hopeless land. God is jealous of this desire. We read of a very holy Jesuit, that he revealed to his companions that he had been detained for some time in purgatory, because in his death the desire of God had not been sufficiently prominent. In the fourth book of St. Bridget's Revelations she mentions that she was shown a third region of purgatory, where there was no pain of sense, but only the pain of loss; and she was told that souls were imprisoned there, who in lifetime had not had an ardent desire of God. In the same book she also tells us, that, when she was praying for the soul of a certain hermit, who had recently died, our Blessed Lady appeared to her, and told her that he would have entered heaven immediately if he had not been wanting in the vehemence of his desire of God. St. Mechtildis, in the fifth book of her Spiritual Grace, speaks of the same region of purgatory,

where there is only the pain of loss, the pain arising, as a soul detained there described it to her, from the very burning of that intolerable desire which had been so cold and remiss in life. This union therefore of fear and desire is especially to be looked for in the matter of death. Not to fear death is a slight to Him who made it our special punishment. Not to desire death is an indifference to Him, whom we can only reach by passing through it.

There are some who are haunted by a fear of death. Its physical horrors are continually before them. They dread the pain. They shrink from the darkness. This fear mounts at times almost to a panic. It has often had its rise in some circumstance of early life, or in some defect of early teaching. It is sometimes the result of morbid nervousness. But this is not the fear of death to be cultivated. No good comes of it. To be scared is not to be afraid with any reasonable or fruitful fear. No fear is a godly fear which fastens so intensely on the physical pains of death. Then there is another fear of death, which belongs to those who are not right with God, and who are procrastinating, if not their repentance, at least their fervour; as if there were, or could be, such a thing as procrastinated fervour! It is not the bodily pains of death which frighten these men. It is the uncertain issue. It is the being reluctantly dragged up to the settlement of a question, which it is the crying sin of their lives to leave unsettled. The theology of death is all a blind mist to them. They can see nothing more than that it is a dark leap into the awful unknown, the outer chaos which to men who do not meditate seems to girdle the world of matter and sense. Plainly there can be no sanctification in such a fear as this. The fear of death which is desirable, the fear of it which is almost indispensable to holiness, is rather the fear of God than the fear of death, the fear of God localised as in a shrine, determined

to a particular time, as if it were a ritual in which He would make some dread but gracious manifestation of Himself. This fear is full of grace, and is hardly capable of excess. This is what we are to aim at. This is the fear which glorifies deathbeds, the beginning of that ecstatic fear which makes the angels tremble so blissfully before the Throne.

But there is an ordinary, natural, simple-hearted, Christian fear of death, which is lower than this, and is not only blameless, but full of materials for good. Sober piety cannot be without this fear. The old must fear death, because it is so near. Its shadow is already on them, and they shiver because the sunshine is intercepted. The expectation even of a coming good becomes a painful fear, when the event is close at hand. The young fear death, because preparation for it is so uncongenial to their habits of thought and time of life. They dwell in brightness, and they have not proved yet how thin and wan a shining earthly brightness is. Experience has not told them yet how really autumnal is the very spring of youth. The sinner fears death, because his penance is not done yet; and the preacher only irritates him when he says, that the longer death is delayed the less likely is he to die repentant. The lukewarm fear death with an instinctive, almost prophetic fear, both because to them the act itself is so often terrible and doubly penal, and because such souls so easily make final shipwreck there. The good fear it, because the risk is so much the more anxious, now that the prize seems the more possible. We strain hardest for things which are almost but not quite within our reach. Moreover, humility always calculates against itself, and therefore a slight exaggeration in the fear of death is almost a feature in true devotion. Some men do not fear death, some even of good men, of men more than good, coming near to the saintly. Such a

disposition may be a work of grace. Grace is many-sided, and works by means of opposites with astonishing facility. Yet this absence of the fear of death is extremely undesirable, and greatly to be suspected. It is not unlikely to be a delusion; and if it is a delusion, it is one of peculiar danger. This fearlessness can only be safe when it belongs to great heights of sanctity. We should pray hard not to be of those who do not fear death; for such souls, with common attainments, are not easy to be saved.

But from the fear of death let us turn to the desire of it. What we have said of the fear of death we may say also of the desire of death, only we should say it still more emphatically, that the desire which is part of holiness must be rather a desire of God, than a desire of death. World-weariness is a blessed thing in its way, but it falls short of being a grace. To be weary of the world is very far from being detached from it. I am not sure that there is not a weariness of the world, which is itself a form of worldliness. World-wearyed men often think and speak of death in a poetical, voluptuous way, which is most ungodly. They talk as if the turf of the churchyard were a bed of down, as if the grassy ridge were a pillow on which to lay our tired heads and slumber, and as if the grave were a cradle in which we should be rocked to sleep as the earth swayed, and so voyage unconsciously through space, like a sleeping child in a ship at sea. None but atheists could speak thus of death, if those who so speak really weighed their words. Such men habitually regard death as an end, and not as a beginning. It has been observed of intellectual men, that such talking of death, is often a symptom of incipient mental aberration. It is certainly true that happy men more often desire death than unhappy men, and desire it more strongly, and that their desire is more truthful and more holy. An unhappy man desires death rather than God.

He desires it with a kind of heathen despondency. He quotes the *Odyssey* and the *Æneid*. The pathetic imagery of those poems is more congenial to him than the straightforward realities of Christian theology. He fixes his eye morbidly on death; but he is anxious it should not look over death and beyond it. Whereas a happy, light-hearted, sunny-spirited Christian man, who has no quarrel with life, except its possibilities of sinning, somehow feels its burden more than the unhappy man, who clings to life with a sort of morose, sulky enjoyment. Yet, while the happy man feels its burden, his happiness inclines him to be eager for beginnings rather than to be impatient for conclusions. Thus death is to him less the end of life, than the beginning of eternity. He desires God rather than death; for it is the gift of a joyous heart to find short ways to God from the most unlikely places.

The desire of death, then, may be a great grace, and imply very much. But it must be when the soul is really athirst for God, and only looks wistfully at death as the portal it must pass to reach Him, just as an impatient traveller sees nothing but the mountain-pass or the harbour mouth. Yet this desire may also be a delusion, and often is so. In those who are actually dying it may be a physical effect of exaltation from drugs, or a kind of inebriety of fear. In these cases we do not like to see it in those we love, but fortunately it has not much of a moral character about it. It is rather one of the dishonours of our flesh, one of those indignities of dying, from which so few deathbeds are entirely free. In the case of the living, the best test of the desire of death is the one already given, namely, whether it is rather God than death that we desire. At the same time it is perfectly lawful to desire freedom from pain, to sigh for rest, to long for deliverance from cares and responsibilities, to be weary of sorrow and weary of endur-



ance, and, above all these things, to yearn for the inability to sin. But then these wishes must not be all, nor by themselves. They must coexist with the desire of God, and that desire must be sovereign and predominant. Of course it were better if God alone were our desire. This is what we must covet; but we are speaking now of what is safe and lawful. One remark, however, applies to all desire of death—it must invariably be mixed with fear. A moment will come, and it oftenest comes some time before death itself, when, if the desire has been from God, He will Himself withdraw the fear. Men do not often seem to be afraid in the very act of dying. Either there is an unexpected facility in dying, or a peculiar grace. Fear leaves even the most timorous, before the moment comes in which they have most to fear. These then are two gifts which we should long for, the fear of death and the desire of death. It is not likely they should ever be equally balanced in any soul; but for my own part, calculating all things, I would rather the fear should predominate over the desire. Perhaps the two dispositions have their appointed hours, and it may be that the one flows when the other ebbs. If it is so, we may be sure that the high-tide of our desire is fixed by the high-tide of our fear. He will desire most who has feared most. Of all saving things, fear, if it is not the most fertile, is at least the most undeluding.

Assuming then that we have rightly and safely both feared death and desired it, let us next consider what we look like when we are dying. What are the phenomena which we exhibit to the eye of God, as well as those who are mourning round us? It is plain that God sees much more than men see, much more than we ourselves are conscious of; and this last is far more than men see. It appears to be one of the trials of the dying that they cannot make themselves understood. In death, as at other times,

the penetration of God is on the whole in our favour. He sees our evil as men cannot see it; but then He sees also the infirmity of a created nature, as creatures themselves can never see it. He perceives extenuations where men either perceive them not, or mistake them for aggravating circumstances. On the whole therefore God's knowledge is on our side; and the purblind unkindness of our fellowmen presides over a less gentle tribunal than the spotlessness of His unspeakable sanctity. His very justice is largesse compared with the sympathy of men. His love would be straitened in the widest allowances of their charity. For the present, then, we would rather think of what men see in us when we are dying, than of what God sees. What do we look like to men, when we are dying?

It is hard to lay down general rules in a matter wherein there is so much diversity. Some men look like their old selves, some as if they had got a new self. Some deaths are touching, because they are so simply what we should have expected beforehand. Others are startling, because they are such amazing revelations. Most frequently men look new in dying. Death discloses whole regions of unexplored character. Life has not by any means drawn us out as it might have done. We all go to our graves unknown, worlds of unsuspected greatness. In truth, life is but a momentary manifestation of us. The longest life is too narrow for our breadth. We are capable of a thousand positions, and life has only placed us in two or three. Our probation is but a specimen, a sort of matriculation trial for the career of eternity. We divine from it, rather than judge by it. It is thus that the dying so often surprise their friends, and leave them in as much amazement as if they had seen a visible glory round their brows. Some men, like the dolphin, only show their brightest tints in the act of dying. These are close characters, deep hearts, but

niggardly in outward demonstrations, men whom few have loved, and who have not been valued rightly even by those who valued them. Some men die grandly, who have lived pusillanimously. Others live hiddenly, and only publish themselves in death. Others have been dark all their lives, begin to grow luminous as they die, and die at the moment when a whole universe of light seems on the point of bursting from them. In truth it does burst, but on the other side, mingling its light with the splendours of eternity. St. Philip tells us how astonished he was more than once with the majesty of a freshly unimprisoned soul.

Sometimes childhood returns in death, both with its evil and its good. Old habits revive, habits that have been overlaid by the contrary habits of long years, or which grace seemed to have extinguished. Now,—which habits shall have possession of the man, as he steps into eternity, the more natural habits of earlier life, or the painfully acquired habits of more careful years? It seems as if it were a problem. Surely it cannot be so in reality. There is also a strange acute working up of the guilt of youth, as if faults had never been repented of, or as if absolutions did not penetrate much below the surface. Sorrow does not give us either the free time or the disengaged attention to study the matter, else we might learn wonderful things about the soul, from the phenomena of deathbeds. Even the possibilities of our characters seem at times to unfold themselves before us when we die. Our capabilities of evil assume fearful shapes, fearfully definite, and overwhelm the soul with hideous visions. It is as if our conscious life went deeper down into our souls than it had ever done before, as if death were hunting it from earth over chasms and into caves, and all at once it faces some hitherto unsuspected possibility of uncommitted sin, like coming suddenly on a precipice and looking over, when we have lost our way

among the mountains in the night. But so it is, that in one way or another death exposes the barrenness of some natures, and the richness of others, and this last is more particularly the case with women. Perhaps, upon the whole, feminine character is more undeveloped in life than the masculine.

But there is one phenomenon of the deathbed which deserves particular attention, both because, in appearance at least, it is so common, and also because it is so distressing to the witnesses. I allude to that half-conscious stupidity, which is so often drawn like a veil round the faculties of the dying. Who has not seen it? Who has not chafed in its presence, when it dared to cling like some dishonourable cloud round the noble spirits of those we loved, whose mountain heights deserved to shine calm, erect, and clear in the glory of the setting sun? Yet much of this may be only seeming, like the processes of thought in a drowning man, so vivid, clear, and, if we may so word it, simultaneously consecutive, when he is suffocating, and only flinging wild, concentrated, glaring looks to the banks for help. The experience of persons, whom the saints have miraculously cured at the last moment of life, seems to go that way. Death after all is a darkening and a disappearance of those we love, and we must be content to take it so. It is only a question of more or less,—where the darkness shall begin, and what it shall eclipse first. To the others who have loved the dying and have gone before him, it is not a darkening but a dawning. Perhaps to them it is the brightest dawn, when it has been the most opaque and colourless sunset on the side of earth. Great operations of grace may be hidden under this apparent stupidity; and on the other hand, great interior trials may be experienced during it. It may only pervade the tabernacle of flesh, while, underneath it, the soul may be living a life of pre

cipitate quickness in some new and filial intercourse with God.\*

If the stupidity is real, it may be itself a penalty, one of those unconscious penalties which in the things of God are so terrific. As I have said of sudden death, it may be like never dying, and so losing that most gracious chance, a chance gracious for many other reasons besides its being the last. Yet after all it is but ante-dating death, as madness may do a score of years before we die. To all practical intents we have died when the stupidity began, and if, like an evening storm, it clears off before night falls, then is it another chance for us, as if a saint had raised us up by miracle for a little while. Who has not seen how profoundly calm the mind is, which raises itself out of a stupor to perform the act of dying? At the worst it only shows, as all things else that have to do with death, that we must get our dying done before we lie down to die, so far at least as may be. For alas! there will be always much left to do, always much which suddenly seems all important, and yet now must actually be left undone.

Such is our look when we are dying. Now how does God look on us? "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." All things considered, this is not a revelation we should have expected. There is much to surprise us in it, and yet, when we have fed long upon its consolations, we are surprised again to find how it falls in with our idea of God, and how it illuminates His perfections. It is so familiar to us now, that it is not easy for us to realise how strange it has a right to be. Death is the penalty of sin, the chosen punishment, the choice of God Himself. Mercy may mingle with punishment. In God's punishments, even the hopeless one, it mingles

\* May I venture to say, that, from materialistic habits of mind, some medical writers have made too much of this stupidity?

largely. But that these punishments should be precious in the sight of God is something more than this, something beyond what we could have expected, something which is full of mystery. Death is touching. There is an inevitable poetry about it, of which no horror or disgrace can wholly strip it. The Creator is touched with the woes of His creatures. There is a pathos in death, as of a setting sun. But it is not merely compassionate sympathy, which the sight of His servants' deaths draws forth from God. They are precious in His sight. Ignoble as they are in the world's eye, the creature's dishonour, its most repulsive feebleness, the shame of his physical misery, God does not simply bear with them, or condescend to nurse us through them. They are precious in His sight. They are His jewels, a something in creation which He keeps for Himself, a tithe paid Him, which He lays up in heavenly storehouses. Surely it is because Jesus was to die, and the Cross has made the punishment an honour to such as make their deaths a Calvary. That blessed death is the vast sunset in which we all sink to rest. It lingers on earth's horizon till the day of doom, and we all set in it, encompassed with a mellow glory which is not our own. Death was precious to God of old, because Jesus was to die. It is precious to Him now, because Jesus has already died.

God's attitude towards death, therefore, is something very peculiar. He seems, not exclusively, but very singularly, to concentrate His creative love upon it. This is the case whether His love takes the form of severity or of indulgence; for death-bed severity is often deepest love by being the anticipation of a justice which is a thousand times more tolerable on this side the grave than on the other. He sometimes waits till death to reward past endeavours, to remove dryness, to withdraw temptations, or to give a long-contested victory over some besetting fault, such as uncharitableness, unbelief,



injustice, or a hard heart. Then, on the other hand, He sometimes puts off our interior trials till death, and sanctifies us then with a rapidity which is the extremity of suffering. Sometimes He waits till then to punish carelessness and venial sin. Some men are less likely to fail under a weight in the hour of death, while to other men it is the likely hour for failing. Our Father's love learns from His wisdom how to dispose things in the gentlest way. On the other hand He often fulfils only in death the prophecies of our past lives, especially the prophecies of our early years: or He lets us learn then for the first time, that a work has long been done in our souls, which we have regretted as undone, and longed to have it done. Some He blindfolds in death, that not a breath may tarnish their humility. Others He floods with light that they may throw themselves the more fearlessly into His eternal arms. None of His servants does He disappoint in death. All find riches there, more than they looked for, both in kind and in degree. What is precious to Himself, He makes unspeakably precious to us. Faith cannot so misread the signs as to be mistaken. The Creator has felt the exile of the creature a burden, if I may dare to say so, as well as the poor creature itself. Like other fathers, He wants His children home. Thus He has a predilection for the hour of death. Of all the hours of life it is most His. So in it His love is special, and where love is special, justice is special also.

What kind of deaths, then, are those which are more particularly precious in His sight? A saint's death is a work of divine art, accomplished by supernatural skill, and flushed with the glow of eternal beauty. No two are alike, and all are beautiful. We can but select some specimens from the various multitude. The first may be the death of those who have always been dying to them-

selves. They have adopted this for the form of their spiritual life, as St. Andrew Avellino did. It is a death like the death of Christ, the death of Him who "pleased not Himself." It is the last act of a life which has been death all through, the last death of a thousand deaths. There is a harmony between death and such a life as this, which makes music in the ear of God. For the most part, the less a death stands apart from the foregoing life, the less it is a detached and separate mystery,—the more has it a look of completeness and perfection about it. This is in truth a very blessed death.

Then there is the death of desire, the kind of death our Blessed Lady died. This belongs to souls to whom God is everything, and to whose simplicity nothing is anything, except God. He has not shared their love—He has sovereignly possessed it. They were sick of all the glorious world, because God was not wholly in it. It had no attractions for them, because God was their one attraction. He fed them with His choicest gifts; but they sickened even then, because His gifts were not Himself. He was jealous, and they were jealous also. They will make bold with Him rather than go without Him. They are all for Him. He also must be as if He were all for them, theirs and only theirs. So the years dragged on with them. They were prompt and brisk, and knew not how they could be so. They were dying all the while they were living. Their life was so completely in Him, that it was almost fictitious as an earthly life. They trailed themselves wearily to life's edge, and then languished for a while, and afterwards, like men bound hand and foot, these helpless captives of divine love fell over into eternity.

Then there is the death of humility. This is a death full of worship. It is a magnificent profession of faith. It praises God. Part of its beauty is in its being so suitable

to a creature. It is full of the knowledge of God, and teaches His greatness by the shining light it casts upon it. The soul dies in the attitude of adoration, and is found already prostrate before the Vision which beams upon its sight. We should have thought it was a death which angels would especially delight to see. It pleads no merits. It rests upon no services. It covets the least blessings of the Church, as eagerly as if it had nothing else divine about it. It has a special devotion to the sanctity of God, and longs to be clean, and even cleaner, and impossibly clean, before the sight of His unblemished majesty. It counts on nothing but mercy. When it doubts, it does not so much doubt the vastness of God's compassion, as it suspects some special impossibility of its own forgiveness. It is the death of the child, who dies looking into his father's face. How beautiful the smile of infantine contentment, which settles there the moment after !

Then again there is the death of detachment, a death which is hardly a death, because there is nothing to die to, nothing to be loosened from, nothing to leave behind. It is more like a translation than a death. The soul has either never rooted itself in earth, or has unrooted itself long since, so that it has died spiritually before it has died physically. What is left for such a death to be, except an act of love ? It is the performing of a sacred ritual, rather than the paying of a penalty. It is rather the peaceful ceremonious fulfilment of a precept than the trembling endurance of a punishment. A hard life makes an easy death. But what life is more hard than one of detachment ? A man who is detached is no longer a child of earth ; he is an angel entangled in mortal flesh. He is living in heaven already ; only he lives there blindfold, and sees not the Vision yet. Men like these,—how peacefully they die ! They die with natural ease, as if they were used to it, and had done so

many times before. It seems as if there was too little pomp about their end. If we have not some spiritual discernment, a feeling almost of dissatisfaction comes over us, as if they might be under some delusion and were not making enough of death. Detachment is the hardest of all spiritual phenomena to understand, while it is one of the simplest to express in words. But the deaths of detached souls are dear to God. Hence it is that the deaths of the poor are often so precious in His sight. Poverty is in itself so pregnant with blessings, that even material poverty surrounds itself with benedictions for which it has not striven. God loves to have His creatures loose and unrooted. There is not a more wondrous earnest of a happy death, than that rare sweetness of an uprooted yet still blossoming old age. In all the gardens of the Church there is no blossom more heavenly than that.

Let us speak of one more death, and then close our list. Let it be the death of saintly indifference. This is a death so obscurely veiled in its own simplicity that we can hardly discern its beauty. We must take it upon faith. It is the death of those who for long have been reposing in sublimest solitude of soul upon the will of God. All complications have disappeared from their inward life. There is a bare unity about it, which to our unseeing eyes is barren as well as bare. All devotions are molten in one. All wishes have disappeared, so that men look cold, and hard, and senseless. There is no glow about them when they die. They die in colourless light. They make no demonstrations when they go. There is no pathos in their end, but a look, it is only a look, of stoical hardness. They generally speak but little, and then it is not edifying; but rather on commonplace subjects, such as the details of the sick room, or news about relatives; and they speak of these things as if they were neither interested in them, nor trying to take an interest.

Their death, from the very excess of its spirituality, looks almost animal. They lie down to die like beasts, such is the appearance of it ; independently, as if they needed none of us to help them ; and uncomplainingly, as if fatalism put them above complaining. They often die alone, when none are by, when the nurses are gone away for awhile. They seem almost as if they watched the opportunity to die alone. As they have lived like the eagles of the mountain-tops, so like the eagles they mostly die high up without witnesses, and in the night. This death is too beautiful for us to see its beauty. It rather scares us by something about it which seems inhuman. More of human will would make it more lovely to us ; for what is there to be seen when the will of the saint has been absorbed long since into the will of God ? Like the overflow of some desert wells, the waters of life sink into the sand, without a tinkling sound to soothe the ear, without a marge of green to rest the eye.

These are the deaths which are especially precious in the sight of God. But far lower deaths than these are precious to Him also. Were it not so, there would be little consolation for ourselves. Our attainments must be other than they are, or we must look to dying in lowlier places and in more ordinary ways. It is hard not to have some wishes about our own death. Neither is it at all clear that such an absence of wishes would be more perfect for such as we are. The wishes of the creature seem often to move the love of God. Mercy not unfrequently appears to have fixed upon no road of her own, but waits for us to lead, and she will do our bidding. Is it certain that even in the saints the supernatural has altogether suspended the natural ? In us at least, to be natural is almost a grace, and to be natural with God is quite a grace. The supernatural purifies and ennobles the natural in most good hearts, and does not altogether kill it. But I will take leave to doubt this total

extinction of nature even in the saints. So we may blamelessly wish wishes about our own death, and our wishes shall only give more gracefulness and more sincerity to our conformity of will with God.

First, then, we should wish, indeed do we not already unconditionally pray for it? to have all the usual sacraments, to be surrounded with every benediction of the Church which belongs to the soothing pageantry of the last hour, the unbroken presence of a priest of the Most High, frequent absolutions, and St. Peter's last act of indulgent jurisdiction. We can spare none of these things, not so much as one drop of holy water. Dying souls are as thirsty as the desert sands, and will drink in all dews of heaven which may be allowed to fall upon them. We would have relics of the saints about us or in the room, so that we might as it were be touching the hem of their garments, as well as multiply the number of angels in our room; for must not angels always be sentinels where relics are? We would have our Blessed Lady present, and St. Joseph, according as we understand them to have promised that they would be. We do not ask to see or hear them. We think of what we are, and shrink from such petitions, though to make them might be not unhumble. Only at least let us have the real protection of their presence, with as much or as little of the sensible joy of it as shall seem fitting to the divine condescensions. Our patron saints and angels too we would have to be present there, and we would even make bold to supplicate for the human-hearted Raphael, so safe a comrade on a long and unknown journey, and for the affectionate St. Michael, who is the viceroy of purgatory, and will one day present us at the court of heaven.

We would wish for the use of reason to the last. Ready to obey, we would even plead with those who might wish, for the lulling of our pain, to give us opiates at the last.



Let us go to God with the full possession of our reason. We are ready to submit, if God wills it otherwise. He may take us in our sleep ; but we would rather not. Nay, we know that delirium has come sometimes as an answer to holy prayers, that so the graces of a glorious death might be shrouded from the eyes of men. No such prayers belong to us. We would ask for entire consciousness, so that our last breath might end an intelligent act of love. Yet we would not lay too much stress on this. We would rather leave to God all that is physical about our death. We only ask for this, because we think it is a blessing which may haply be something more than physical. This may be imagination. We are but children in the sight of God. He finds a worship even in the foolishness of our desires, and is not impatient.

The grace, which of all others we covet for our last hour, is that of perfect contrition. We would have the fear of sin, which has haunted us through life, grow yet more perfect when we come to die. We must all die in love, if we would die well. But there are many loves, and we should choose to die in contrite love. There has always seemed to me a special attractiveness about contrition. It appears to come out of a special devotion to the Attributes of God. No form of holiness is so winning, as that which is based on an abiding sorrow for sin. We would long therefore for a grand contrition at the hour of death. Perhaps then we shall fear purgatory more keenly than we fear it now. There are some who do not fear it, but think of it only as a piece of unmerited good fortune. In truth it is so, when we think of the dark possibilities. Yet it is more than this. It cannot be well not to fear it. We shall most likely have better discernment when we come to die ; and we shall then fear all punishments of God, because of the burning of our desire to see His face, which is the unspeakable thirst of dying

souls. Has any dying man ever spoken joyously of his approaching passage into purgatory? I have neither read nor heard of any. Such is rather the language of those who are far off from it, with all their unclipped abilities to sin upon them. It would sound harsh on a deathbed, and offend our pious instincts. Thus the desire to go at once to God may give a new value to contrition in our eyes when we come to die. Indeed if it be reverent, for to be particular with God goes near to an irreverence, we would ask to have so vehement a sorrow for our sins, that its intensity might be the proximate cause of our death, that we might die a minute or an hour sooner than we should have died had our sorrow for sin been less. But this is perhaps too magnificent a grace for us.

Then also we would desire not to die what is called a triumphant death. Grace may triumph over us. Our end may be a signal triumph of God's mercy. But for ourselves all triumph is unmeet, unless for some special end God so ordained it. Gertrude of Adelhausen, a Dominicaness, laughed out loudly all through her agony, and died laughing; so inebriated was she with love of God. St. Mary d' Oignies sang loud and clear three days and nights before she died, because the Holy Ghost had given her such a gift of jubilee. St. Elizabeth of Hungary turned her face to the wall, and sang without moving her lips, as if a nightingale were in her throat, and died thus singing in her ecstasy. But these things are not for us. If ever in life we should be real, and might hope to be so, it would be at the hour of death. Yet there is unreality even there. We can act, and be affected even then, and our drama and our affectation may not be faultless. Then there are inculpable unrealities to which bodily weakness exposes us, and these are not moral, but we shrink from them very greatly in the prospect. Delusion is everywhere, until we have parted

company with the Deceiver, and gone to live in the light of God. Triumphant deathbeds appear to be encompassed with delusions. We had rather indeed that our death should be mostly silent, lest even in the conscious utterance of edifying words we should get from under the weight of God's fear and out of the sense of His presence. It is hardly unloving to wish what those we leave behind will like least and will find even painful: it is not unloving when the occasion is so great as that of death, and the interests at stake are the substantial things of our eternity. We may even wish what our last words might be. It is not unchildish so to do. It is the spontaneous utterance of our devotion. Perhaps we should desire, with frequent invocations of holy Names, with frequent commendations of our spirit into our Father's hands, to say at last as expressing all, Sancta Trinitas, unus Deus, miserere mei. Perhaps we have already wished too much.\* But we are ready for any other will of God. As to the when, the where, the how, and with what pain, we are to die, we have no wish about all that. We leave it all to God. He knows what is best. We will have nothing to do with death merely as a physical thing. To us it shall never be anything else but the gateway of our Father's house.

We are never tired of that old picture from the first of all the gospels, the book of Genesis, the picture of the Creator brooding over His own creation, as if in survey of it and in complacency, and pronouncing it very good. It is always new to us, almost the more new the more it is familiar. So is it sweet to think of the same Creator, bending and brooding over the beautiful deathbeds of those who die in Jesus, as if the beauty of them was precious to Him, as

\* Thus for instance, when St. Gertrude, out of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, prayed that she might have to swallow nothing, whether food or medicine, after the Viaticum, our Lord said He disapproved the prayer.—*Revelat.* lib. iii. cap. 35.

if each of them was another faithful portrait of His dear Son, another translucent depth of Calvary imaging His own perfections. God is the Creator: death is His own invented punishment, the sternest old historic monument on earth, and He the Creator has died Himself: and now look at Him, pathetically outpouring all this love over us His timid dying creatures! Is it not almost a reverent joy for us to think that we have still one action left to do, which will be precious in the sight of God? Is it then only a fear and trembling, and not a joy as well, that we know that the messenger of death, near even if he still be out of sight, is swiftly now with soundless footfall stealing up to us? There is a quiet, sweet anxiety to die, which makes our lives more diligent, and is exceeding happiness.

*SELF-DECEIT.*

## I.

## SIMPLICITY.

SELF-DECEIT is perhaps the most uncomfortable and disquieting subject in the whole of spiritual theology. Why then should we speak of it? For that very reason. The spiritual life is a reality, by far the most real of all realities, because it is our intercourse with God on the most momentous of all interests. It cannot help being real, real with a reality which must often be felt as an important and inopportune yoke upon our frivolous nature. Yet if we are in earnest about saving our souls, and it would be fearful indeed not to be in earnest about such a matter, we should not look about in the spiritual life for smooth things and easy sayings, but for true things and sincere sayings. Some people pride themselves on their principle of getting out of the way of frightening things, and consider it the height of discretion to keep such matters at arm's length, and to be very solemnly severe on books and preachers that profess to deal in them. Such persons are simply insincere, and we must make no account of them. They are worth very little in the sight of God, and therefore their example is worth nothing to us. They must be judged after they die, and it is greatly to be suspected that the judgment will throw a somewhat disconsolate light over this eccentric discretion of

theirs. On the whole the judgment is an exceedingly awkward time for finding out mistakes, particularly indiscreet discretions,—for many reasons which it is not of consequence for us to go into, because not holding the opinions of these persons we are not likely to fall into their mistakes, whatever other mistakes may befall us.

We are very much in earnest with God. We desire to advance in His ways. So we make up our minds to grapple with this ugly subject of self-deceit, and take a very close view of it, believing that the unpleasant operation will be of the greatest service to our souls. Many souls have unquestionably been lost altogether by self-deceit. Many more through the same delusion have fallen far short of the purposes of God upon them. In the case of all of us, numbers of graces have been wasted through not meeting with correspondence, and most frequently that want of correspondence has been attributable to self-deceit. A disease, from which almost everybody suffers, and whose consequences may easily be so ruinous, claims an honest investigation from those who desire to be honest both with God and self.

Untruthfulness is a very odious thing. It is the most offensive and provoking charge we can make against another. Men of honour consider that it is an imputation which can only be washed out with blood; though what sort of honour this is, it may perhaps be difficult to say, and more difficult still to discern how blood cleanses it when it has been stained. Anyhow it is unpleasant to shed the blood of a fellow-creature, and to most men considerably more unpleasant to shed their own; and hence the determination to run this double risk shows how odious the charge of untruthfulness is to the hearts of men. But this is part of the world's self-deceit, that is, of everybody's self-deceit. We would fain persuade ourselves that untruthfulness is



very rare. Else why should we murder our companion merely for attributing to us something very common? Either we have persuaded ourselves that it is not very common, or we are so bent on persuading ourselves of it, that we have made up our minds to shoot any man who raises the question in our own case. Duelling, however, is manifestly not a counsel of perfection. So we want nothing more of it than this proof how odious the charge of untruthfulness is to the human heart.

But unfortunately this untruthfulness is not rare. It is the commonest of all miseries. It is as universal as the consequences of the fall. A truthful man is the rarest of all phenomena. Perhaps hardly any of us have ever seen one. It is far from unlikely that we have not. Thorough truthfulness is undoubtedly the most infrequent of graces. The grace of terrific austerities and bodily macerations, which has characterised some of the saints, the grace to love suffering, the grace of ecstasy, the grace of martyrdom, all these are commoner graces than that of thorough truthfulness. The fact is, we are all of us thoroughly untruthful, those of us most so who think ourselves least so, those of us least so who think ourselves most so. The first step towards being truthful is the knowledge that we are far from it; for out of that knowledge follows the hatred, the determination, and the aim, which bears us on towards truthfulness. We have no idea how untruthful we are, until we come to examine ourselves. We must not therefore be content with a general admission of guilt: but we must go into ourselves, and ferret out the whole of the misery and corruption. It is worth while spending two-thirds of our life in doing this work alone, trying to be less of liars than we are. Rude words! yet not unfriendly ones, as the issue will show.

It is of little use to plunge into this repulsive subject of

self-deceit, unless we are conscious to ourselves of a manly determination to make a thorough work of it. Whoever has not got that, had better read no further, or else he will mistake what is said. A man always makes a mistake if he applies to himself what is meant for another. It is to be feared there is a great deal of promiscuous physicking of ourselves, after our neighbour's prescriptions, in the spiritual life. It is not less ruinous to the constitution of the soul, than a similar practice would be to the constitution of the body. Whatever is said here is meant only for honest people ; to dishonest persons it will mean something quite different, and be by no means beneficial. Furthermore, it is of little use to plunge into this repulsive subject of self-deceit, unless we take up, as a standard or ideal, some notion, even though it be a negative one, of Christian simplicity. The acquisition then of this inadequate idea of Christian simplicity shall be our first occupation, and we will try to obtain it by an analysis of its impediments.

Christian simplicity, or holy truthfulness, consists in three things, each of which is a good deal rarer than a black swan is out of Australia. It requires, first, that we be truthful with ourselves, secondly, that we be truthful with others, and thirdly, that we be truthful with God.

There are certain ways of becoming truthful with self, which are at once infallible and indispensable. We shall see if we have acquired the virtue by seeing if we have taken the means to acquire it. The whole inward corruption of our nature is neither more nor less than the raw material of self-deceit. The malignity of our corruption is in its falsehood ; and the person we are most interested to deceive is self. With what success we accomplish this, the whole world can testify. Now, if we are in earnest in undeceiving ourselves, we must be taking real pains to acquire self-knowledge. Unless we know ourselves, and,

as far as may be, the ins and outs of our very complicated and inconsistent character, we are clearly in no position to act truly. But it is not easy to know ourselves. On the contrary, it is the hardest thing in the world. Are we really then taking pains to acquire a knowledge of self? Are we honest in our examinations of conscience? Are we punctual in them? We may fairly suppose there are not many men trying to save their souls, of whose daily regularities a brief examination of conscience is not one. Now what is our regularity in this respect, and our accuracy, and our diligence, and our real view of its importance? If we are not taking pains to know ourselves, we may be quite sure we are not truthful with self. We can hardly be taking pains without knowing it; for this unfortunately is a matter in which the pains are very unpleasant, and it is only wounded men in battle who are sometimes unconscious of unpleasant things.

It is of so much consequence to know ourselves, where religion is concerned, that if we not only do not take any pains after self-knowledge, but even rather get out of its way, we can hardly blind ourselves to the fact that we are not in earnest about our souls. But who gets out of the way of self-knowledge? It is plain enough that many take little pains about it. Idleness is the most natural thing in the world. But who gets out of the way of it, that is, takes pains to remain in ignorance about himself? Nearly every one. There is scarcely a man or woman on their way, as they think, to holiness, who does not habitually do this, and in more ways than one. Here is one way. People go on, as if on purpose, in a dim, misty, confused manner. They suspect, perhaps, that they do not prepare for confession as carefully as they ought to do. They have a vague feeling that there is neither enough examination, nor enough pains about contrition, and that the exuberant

graces of the sacrament are certainly realised in the most partial way, and the sacrament itself perhaps risked. They are always intending to look into the matter, and never doing it. Sometime or other they will, but somehow or other they never can do it to-day. They are not sure of the evil. The removal of it therefore is not a plain duty. For perhaps after all, on inquiry, it may be found there is nothing to remove. By shirking the self-knowledge, they keep at arm's length the obviousness of the duty; so that they seem to gain by thus defrauding themselves. Now almost every one has some such woful uncertainty resting on his conscience about some part of his conduct, most often those parts of his conduct which have to do with the practices and observances of the spiritual life, such as prayer, mortification, sacraments, and the like. Thus a man has a veiled muffled feeling, that he is neglecting bodily mortification to such an extent as to be very unsafe for his soul. Yet he will not call this feeling to account, and unmuffle it, and see what it is worth. He could do this very easily. See how any one else could do it for him! Are you all right about bodily mortifications? "I do not feel quite sure about them." True! but it is not exactly a matter to have any doubt about. "Why! it is a long question! there is a great deal to be said." Certainly! there is a good deal to be said about most questions: but why not say it? "Not prepared just now." Well! but is it a matter which will wait? Either you are leading a mortified life or you are not. Five minutes honest self-inspection will tell you at once: and if not, why you can settle forthwith as to the amount of change you must make in your present softness, and then go on. But no! this is a style of spiritual direction far too matter-of-fact for most of us. Indeed we are by no means clear that it is not rude and unfeeling. We cannot have the plasters pulled off our

wounds in this way. There is a certain sort of comfort in a fog, especially for shy men. They are less visible. So we go on with half-a-dozen grave matters resting unsettled and misty and unargued, in a kind of unspeakably slow interior court of chancery. But how with all this, we can think ourselves true or manful it is not quite easy to see. It is a sad annoyance when others find us out ; for it mostly lowers their opinion of us ; but the saddest annoyance of all, to our poor nature, is to find ourselves out ; for, if we lose self's good opinion, we are forlorn indeed ! The worst of it is, that there is a time and a place when and where detection is inevitable. A wise option is that which chooses the less disagreeable rather than the more disagreeable.

Here is another way in which people are dishonest with themselves, either from the dislike of exertion, or from a suspicion that investigation will compel them to commit themselves to God, or definitely deny Him something, both of which they are equally anxious to avoid. It is quite common for men to persist in a course of action, without being sure of their motives, even with an indistinct suspicion that their motives are not adequate or trustworthy. This is peculiarly the case where charity may possibly be concerned. There are many instances, in which, from what we know of ourselves, it is probable beforehand that some amount of jealousy, dislike, rivalry, triumph, or other unworthiness may mingle with our motives, and thus not only vitiate a whole series of actions, but even be superinducing a new habit of uncharitableness, or strengthening an old one, and also hindering all other growths of grace in the soul, so long as this canker is allowed to remain. The same may be said of the works of mercy and charitable enterprises in which we engage. If we have the slightest reason to distrust our motives, the slightest reason to doubt

whether the glory of God, if not unmingled, be at least uppermost in our hearts, we ought resolutely to scrutinise our motives, not merely because of the ruinous loss of merit which we are incurring, but also because of the positive damage done to our soul, and the destruction of works in it, which former operations of grace have constructed.

Do we make our faults a subject of sober and mature reflection? There are times certainly when it is not well to do this, times of temptation, discouragement, and scruple, when our spiritual guides would wisely prohibit our doing so. But on the whole must it not be a necessary part of every good man's religious occupations? If our great object is to save our souls, if our faults are the sole impediments to this, if moreover they are subtle, false-spoken, apt to disguise themselves, expert at putting on the semblance of good, if furthermore they come to life again when they have been killed, and that by the most clever and unexpected resurrections, and that they have such vitality that some of them, certain forms of self-will to wit, can never be put to death even by the saints,—if all these *ifs* are true, we shall surely be in bad case if the mature consideration of our faults is not one of the steadiest and most consistent businesses which we transact in the spiritual life. But is it not the fashion—for it appears that now-a-days we may save our souls fashionably or the reverse—to talk as if everybody was scrupulous, sensitive of conscience, delicately self-suspicious, and distressingly susceptible of divine inspirations, and therefore entitled to the utmost lax limits, which the old theologians, with a kind of edifying and grave ill-humour, hardly consented to allow to souls miserably diseased with an exaggerated scrupulosity? Thus ladies who go to balls, theatres, gay watering-places, and the like, who deny themselves none of the personal luxuries and comforts of the nineteenth century, who find piety very



much squeezed in the pressure of a London season, and yet do not very well see how to make more room for it,—these forsooth are to be supposed to be so many incipient Gertrudes or Teresas! We must not set them to examine their consciences too carefully, because of the extreme sensitiveness they exhibit to their own faults, nor to mortify themselves, because of their already inordinate appetite for discomforts and macerations. Their voluntary social arrangements are the tyranny of indispensable circumstances, claiming our tenderest pity, and to be managed like the work of a Xaxier or a Vincent of Paul, which hardly left those saints time to pray! Their sheer worldliness is to be regarded as an interior trial, with all manner of cloudy grand things to be said about it! They must avoid all uneasiness; for such great graces as theirs can only grow in calmness and tranquillity! It is lucky we may still make a poor drunken Irishman uneasy; for thus we have a chance of saving some souls at least, though of a truth not these London souls. There were old saints in the middle ages, that St. Bernard for example, surnamed the Mellifluous, he of the honied tongue, who, if he had in a leisurely way contemplated some of these moderns on their part to perfection, would have given them a taste of his honey after this fashion:—Sir or Madam, strain every nerve to keep out of hell, which methinks you will not do in this manner; and do use your common sense for a moment to remember that you are dealing with God, who is not “mocked!” A speech, apostolic, and perhaps brutal, which would cause fainting fits, followed by a most reasonable disgust, and be generally condemned in the present day. The fidget is, whether, after all, our modern way is the right way; for if the road should end, and heaven’s gate be found not to be at the end, the condition of these sensitive susceptible souls, which have required so much

smoothing and calming, would be undeniably awkward, and, it is to be feared, helpless.

Once more: there is hardly a man or woman in the world, who has not got some corner of self into which he or she fear to venture with a light. The reasons for this may be various, as various as the individual souls. Nevertheless, in spite of the variety of reasons, the fact is universal. For the most part we hardly know our own reasons. It is an instinct, one of the quick instincts of corrupt nature. We prophecy to ourselves that, if we penetrate into that corner of self, something will have to be done which either our laziness or our immortification would shrink from doing. If we enter that sanctuary, some charm of easy devotion or smooth living will be broken. We shall find ourselves face to face with something unpleasant, something which will perhaps constrain us to all the trouble and annoyance of a complete interior revolution, or else leave us very uncomfortable in conscience. We may perhaps be committed to something higher than our present way of life, and that is out of the question. Religion is yoke enough as it is. So we leave this corner of self curtained off, locked up like a room in a house with disagreeable associations attached to it, unvisited like a lumber closet where we are conscious that disorder and dirt are accumulating, which we have not just now the vigour to grapple with. But do we think that God cannot enter there, except by our unlocking the door, or see anything when He is there, unless we hold Him a light?

This is one branch of Christian simplicity, to be truthful and earnest and real with ourselves. The second is to be truthful and earnest and real with others. Now in order to attain to this, we must, first of all, act as little as may be with reference to the opinions of others. There is a great deal of self-will in the world, but very little genuine

independence of character. All imitation of others is more or less an untruth. We are ourselves, and we must act as ourselves, and be like ourselves, and consistent with ourselves, and this is hardly what any of us ever are. We go about like weathercocks, ascertaining for ourselves and indicating to others the outlying quarters from which the wind comes. We have no ascertained principles of our own. This leads us into endless petty untruthfulnesses. It makes us seem hypocrites when we are not so; because weakness is apt to look like hypocrisy. No one acts naturally, who imitates others; and no one in the long run is truthful to others who is not natural with others. A discernible self, even if it be an unsatisfactory self, is a grand, genuine, vigorous, and wholesome truth, with a strange and gracious propensity to be very humble, as truths always are.

In the second place, if we wish to be truthful with others, we must avoid explaining and commenting on our own actions in conversation. For, either we must make our conversation like a regular confession, or we must convey an untrue idea of ourselves. Let us take one instance. What is more common for us to say than, "I assure you I did such and such a thing entirely because so and so." Now we know very well that never since we were born, have we ever done any one single action *entirely* for any one single motive. So that here, quite unconsciously, we may be laying claim to a very high and rare grace, to which only a few even of the canonised saints have attained. A man hardly ever comments on his own actions or explains his own motives without being false. The mere omission of his bad makes the enunciation of his good an untruth. He puts himself into a position from which it is scarcely possible for him to extricate himself without damage to his genuineness and simplicity. Yet no one called him into that position. It is only once in a thousand times, at

least in the common affairs of life, that a man is called upon to comment on himself. Nobody wants his comment. People care much less for him either way than he likes to suppose. In truth it is egregious vanity, pompous self-importance, the itch of self-defence, the identifying of personal feeling with the glory of God, or some other similar absurdity of human littleness, which leads him into it. Avoid therefore all such comments and explanations. Least said soonest mended is never more true than in conversations which turn on self. Why is it that reserved men are so peculiarly given to self-defence? Because close men are hardly ever simple men, and self-defence or self-commentation are growths inseparable from unsimplicity.

Indeed, in the third place, we ought to make self as little as possible the subject of conversation, even in the less dangerous form of straightforward narration. Falsehood comes of it somehow, and the sense of having forfeited grace, and gone down in our own estimation as well as that of others, and, which is more serious, of having grieved the Holy Ghost. This is so undeniably everybody's experience, that it need not be dwelt upon.

In the fourth place, in order to be truthful with others, we should avoid having secrets, and still more avoid becoming the depository of the secrets of others. Nobody will ever be persuaded of this as long as the world lasts. However, truth has to be said, even when the saying of it is too plainly useless. Secrets are nearly the most mischievous things in the world, and almost the most unnecessary. A secret once set upon its course through the world gathers venial sin to itself, as the rolling snowball takes up snow. How few things are there which really need be secrets! How much fewer which, being secrets, need be confided to others! Unless clear duty is there to sanctify it, he who confides a secret to another has laid a burden on him, led

him into temptation, fettered his childlike liberty of spirit, and impaired the presence of God in his soul. This is a serious indictment. But secrets are the garments which of all others self-importance most affects. To be told a secret is the delicatest of flatteries. The teller and listener both grow in their own esteem and in each other's. They become, like Pau-Puk-Keewis, "larger than the other beavers," which is always a pleasant operation to vain nature, though sometimes, as in Hiawatha, entailing uncomfortable consequences. But now, look at your own past life, have not secrets, especially the secrets of others, made you petty, narrow, pusillanimous, conceited, untruthful, unsimple, and out of God's presence? Depend upon it, there is nothing in the world that will more effectually entangle you in unreality than an unnecessary secret. Great-minded men have few secrets.

We must remember also, that the want of truthfulness with others reacts upon ourselves, in the way of blinding us with regard to our own motives and characters. Those who deceive others always end in deceiving themselves. Thus we shall never be truthful with ourselves, unless we are also truthful with others.

Thirdly, and lastly, simplicity requires that we should be truthful with God. It is almost startling to speak of such a thing, because of the horror of supposing an opposite line of conduct possible. Yet alas! it is not only possible, but common. We know how God sees through and through us. We know how bare and odiously intelligible to Him are all the subterfuges of our deceit and misery. We know how His eye rests upon us incessantly, and takes us all in, and searches us out, and as it were burns us with His holy gaze. His perfections environ us with the most awful nearness, flooding us with insupportable light. To His eye there is not only no concealment, there is not even a

softening shade, or a distance to subdue the harshness and veil the unworthiness. Yet, for all this, to be straightforward with God is neither an easy nor a common grace. O with what unutterable faith must we believe in our own falsehood, when we can feel it to be anything like a shelter in the presence of the all-seeing God!

We take liberties with Him, for want of a holy fear. In unprepared petitions, in slovenly sacraments, in cursory self-examinations, in distracted meditations, in outward posture, in inward recollection, in the way in which we postpone Him to other things, we make free with His immense majesty. We try to hide from Him our want of filial confidence. We know how stupid the attempt is. We are well aware that we cannot hide from Him; but we keep our knowledge within us, and will not let it come up to the surface in the shape of practice. We are determined not to realise His terrific greatness, His overwhelming sanctity, or His tingling nearness; and so in numerous little deceitful ways we do not treat Him as the God in whom our understanding believes. It is a shocking thought, to be unreal with God; yet we all of us are so to a most frightening extent. God help us! We are living in a world of the most bewildering and complicated untruthfulness: but it is to be our eternal joy to stand revealed in the blaze of unutterable Truth, and revel in our want of concealment for ever!



*SELF-DECEIT.*

## II.

## THE FOUNTAINS OF SELF-DECEIT.

WE have seen what Christian simplicity requires. Our next enquiry must be into the fountains of self-deceit. They are four in number, the rarity of reliable self-knowledge, self's power to deceive self, self letting itself be deceived by others, and self deceived by Satan.

No wonder that reliable self-knowledge is rare, when so few take pains to acquire it. There are few even who honestly desire it. There are but few men in the world who desire painful things, however salutary they may be; and self-knowledge is both painful in the acquisition and painful in the possession. It is incredible how little honesty there is amongst religious people in religious matters. Many are earnest in their desires to escape hell, but very few to grow in grace or to please God. Perhaps a man in the course of a life of fifty years may meet three people who make God their first object, and he will be lucky to meet three. Yet almost every one claims to be preferring God before all things. What a mass of unwholesome delusion then must the religious world be! It is. A supernatural formalism outside with natural principles of action inside, and a thoroughly natural system, or rather

quackery, of spiritual direction to keep things comfortable and respectable,—alas! it were devoutly to be wished that this definition embraced less than it does.

How very little do even good persons know themselves! Much of what they think is the work of grace about them is simply the providential accident of their circumstances. A man has a very right horror of worldliness, for example, and he thinks, perhaps even thanks God, that he has no tendencies that way. Much evil he has, and is conscious of having, but not this. His circumstances of life change. He becomes rich, or gets into different society, or his health improves and he can do what awhile ago he could not do; and behold! he finds himself worldly, not growing worldly by a process and under temptation, but worldly without any change at all, with a ready-made worldliness, which he has had in his heart all the while. A man cannot be angry in a fainting fit: so this man's worldliness could not develop itself in his old circumstances. It was there nevertheless. Hundreds of people are thoroughly worldly, worldly to the backbone, who flatter themselves they have no taste for the world at all. The fact is we know but little of ourselves, and of the almost inexhaustible possibilities of evil which we have got shut up within our souls. Is not life at every turn making unpleasant revelations of self? But they are revelations, and that is noteworthy. Yet what sort of wisdom is it for a man to shun these revelations, because they disquiet him, when it will so concern him in the day of judgment to have known them? A spiritual life, without a very large allowance of disquietude in it, is no spiritual life at all. It is but a flattering superstition of self-love. But fancy a spiritual system which is to make everybody at ease and comfortable, and takes the banishment of the uncomfortable as its grand principle! It would be laughable, indeed intrinsically it is laughable;

only we cannot laugh because it is such a terribly serious thing for a soul to go wrong in its doom.

Now it is of the last importance to observe, that with good persons the stronghold of worldliness is in this absence of reliable self-knowledge. They have right views about worldliness, and their hearts also are in a great measure right about the matter. They do not wish to be worldly, if they could help it. They may not be prepared to go such lengths in the direction of self-sacrifice as might be well. Nevertheless they are prepared to go some lengths, and that is well. Yet they are worldly, or they become worldly, from the want of self-knowledge. As to the fact, that can hardly be a question. Is it not the standing scandal of the world,—that strange medley of worldliness and devotion which is so common among professedly pious people, that the world, which does not take a particularly accurate view of the matter, pronounces it to be universal? We have prayer and fine dress, alms and luxurious extravagance, sacraments and love of eating and drinking, humility and exclusiveness, spiritual conferences and the worship of great people, balls and communions, benedictions and private theatricals, works of mercy and a scheming to push advantageous connections, interior life and fine furniture,—all mingled up in such close union and inextricable confusion, that we might lecture on the matter the whole year round, as the nineteenth-century improvement of old-fashioned spirituality: and yet I fear the censorious world would be too stupid to be convinced, that all this was apostolical, evangelical, scriptural, after the mode of the saints, and such like. Whether we are in fault for giving this scandal, or the world for taking it, is of no consequence here. As a matter of fact scandal there is, given or taken. The reason of the fact is the want of reliable self-knowledge. Worldliness is an immense

number of allowable details issuing in an unallowable end. This is partly from the accumulation, and partly from the hold the details have on our affections. Things, which are not wrong in themselves, become wrong when they stand between us and God, unspeakably wrong when they usurp God's place in our hearts. We do not see the real malice of the separate component parts of worldliness, because we do not really know ourselves, and are thus unable to estimate the bad effects, or even the peculiar effects, which make this or that licit amusement become inexpedient in our case, or a certain amount of it downright poison. In the analysis of worldliness, we have to do with questions of kind and questions of degree. Anything like a safe judgment in either of these two classes of questions is impossible without self-knowledge. In a word, the secret power of worldliness is in our ignorance of ourselves, not an unsuspecting ignorance, but an ignorance with a bad conscience, which we will not force to learn its crabbed lesson of self. All supernatural principles and all religious manliness are based on genuine, reliable self-knowledge. Give that conclusion leave to do its work in your soul, and you will see what a change it will bring about!

The second fountain of self-deceit is self directly deceiving self. There are many ways in which this unhappy end is compassed. Vanity is one of the most universal. We all put an absurdly high price upon ourselves. The mercury generally stands too high in us, and indicates wrongly, unless grace holds it down by main force. Even when we have too much sense to speak, we are always inwardly commenting upon our own actions in a most partial manner, and often with a very ingenious and far-fetched partiality. We cherish our own plans, until it is hard to see how God can have any glory at all beyond the sphere of our own influence,

except in other spheres very far away. But the spheres which confine on our own are mistakes, and ought never to have been there at all. Our vocation is to absorb them. This is our view. There is nothing too extravagant for the vanity of our self-love. It does not know an exaggeration when it sees it. Like some oriental languages, its commonest expressions are hyperboles. We should all make open fools of ourselves through vanity, if it were not for three things. First of all, many of us are saved by knowledge of the world, which always carries on famous warfare against self's absurdities. Secondly, many are rescued from exposing themselves, because they have a turn for humour and a keen sense of the ridiculous. Thirdly, grace saves some, by teaching them to put down within themselves those inordinate risings of self-importance, which would else expose them to the contempt of others, though it is not for that reason they are to put them down. An honest humorous sense of ridicule is a great help to holiness. Perhaps nature does not contribute a greater help to grace than this.

Then, again, we deceive ourselves by dwelling on self; for self by a law of its own nature must needs see itself erroneously. The mother can see no imperfection in the babe she is fondling. In her eyes the most hideous little creature is charming. But self nursing self,—the fondest mothers are no match for it in this respect. Brooding on self is a sort of spiritual opium-eating. Nothing but phantasms can come of it. It is through this brooding on self that we arrive at another way of deceiving ourselves; and that is by confusing, almost without seeing it, feelings with facts, and desires with practices. In other words self-love knows how to blend most skilfully its ideal with its realisation or its ideal, so that not only shall nobody else know what is theory and what is practice, but even self shall not be able, at

least with anything like assurance, to discern between the two. Multitudes of souls live through life in a bright haze of this kind, and only get into the clear light as they land on the other side of the grave.

We deceive ourselves also by palliating what is acknowledgedly wrong. There is almost always a running commentary of secret self-excuse passing through our minds. We admit certain actions, or more frequently certain omissions, to be wrong. But we consider that there is something quite peculiar in our circumstances, which makes them less wrong in us than they would be in others. Sometimes it is our temperament, sometimes our health, sometimes our position, sometimes the provocation we have received. Sometimes we pardon ourselves with the very gentlest of reprimands, because we feel that the good points of our character are on the other side of us, as it were, and that this particular failing has the misfortune to light upon the barren or the weak side of us;—and whose character is either complete or equable? So we must think of our opposite good points, by way of comfort and compensation. This method of self-deceit is akin to the practice of putting off the time for a closer acquaintance with our own motives. At present we have a great deal to do; and it is always indiscreet in the spiritual life to take upon ourselves more than we can accomplish. We have manifest faults enough to fight against, so we will adjourn the day for a more thorough search into self. It is as if we said, that we have so much writing to do we have really no time to go out to buy paper or ink. The result of all these various forms of self-deceit is spiritual blindness, a blindness which always has the additional misfortune of thinking that it sees.

The third fountain of self-deceit is self letting itself be deceived by other things or persons, by things or persons external to itself. It is not always easy to distinguish this



process from self deceiving self ; but there is a difference. When we lay ourselves out for praise, or even very obviously acquiesce in it, we are letting ourselves be deceived by others, often without any fault of theirs. We do not plead guilty to half the amount of love of praise which we have in us. It is quite preposterous even in the humblest of us. We live lives of prayer and sacraments, and yet are all the while itching for praise. Who ever saw any one that was not ? The gravest, sleekest, most pompous of men, smooth themselves down and unbend themselves in glossy patronising benevolence under the siren breath of praise, like the swell of a summer sea when the gentle south wind blows. Cold men thaw with an amusing reluctant eagerness under the same operation, and dignity descends even to playfulness under the resistless attractions of praise. Silent men, however, are the grand lovers of praise. They are ruminating creatures ; self is the cud they chew, and, strange to say, they do not find it bitter. Like thirsty camels in the desert who suck up the muddiest water with relish, so we with praise are almost regardless of its quality. No matter how absurd, how unmerited, how exaggerated, or from what feminine or childish incapacity of just appreciation it may spring, wise and grave men among us drink it down. We set a value upon it and attach an importance to it, and feed on its scraps, in a manner which ought to make us thoroughly ashamed of ourselves. All we require is that certain rules of good taste should be observed by those who administer this sweet spoon-meat to us grown-up babies. But these rules vary with national character. An Irishman must be praised differently from an Englishman, and an American, and a Frenchman differently from both, and from each other. But praised we must all be, or we shall sulk. Monkeys can look grave when they scratch each other. But then they are monkeys. We are men, gifted with

reason : how is it we do not smile at an operation which is really so absurd? Because we do not know ourselves. Whoever knew an eminent lover of praise, who did not imagine he was peculiarly above public opinion? Or whoever knew a man that boasted of his independence of the judgments of others, who was not servile, and base, and touchy, and fawning, and deceitful, and vain? After all, we are monkeys, and we only grow into men by knowing that we are not men yet.

We compel others to deceive us by the way in which we talk to them about ourselves. This especially applies to religious conversation, and to all talk about our own characters and peculiarities. Now here we have an alternative. Either we ought to keep our inward life much more secret than we do, or we ought to let it be much more unreservedly known. The middle course is practically to tell lies. The right thing is not to talk about self at all. All self-talk is wretched and mean. Yet it would be difficult to name a practice of Christian perfection harder than the avoiding of it. If we have ever made a real effort to hold our tongues about ourselves for any considerable length of time, we have found out that there may be some things which look easy, and yet are next door to impossibilities. Nevertheless, if we will talk of self, we ought to say much more than we do. If we tell people how our hearts warm with love of God, we ought also to tell them how those same hearts are cheered by having nice things to eat and drink. If we make known our practices of prayer, we ought also to make known our attachment to handsome furniture and becoming dress. If we say how much time and money go to visiting and relieving the poor, we ought also to say how selfish and inconsiderate we are towards our servants, in the matter of their health, comfort, temper, sensibilities, and the like. If we publish our good side, we ought also to publish our

bad side ; else we are practically telling an untruth, making people believe that we are far more noble-minded than we really are, and so causing them by praise, respect, and admiration, to react upon ourselves in the shape of self-deceit.

Alas ! the idolatry of domestic affections is another way in which we let ourselves be deceived by others. Everybody is thought so good in his own family. Men must be notably bad to have the honours of this household canonisation withheld from them. It is like living in air drugged with luscious incense. Conscience is half stifled in it. This is a chief delight of home to our poor conceited nature. It is one of the first principles of the spiritual life that each man should be in his own sight what he is in the sight of God, and nothing more. Yet there are few women, and fewer men, who are not in their own sight what they are in the sight of their family. It is, moreover, to be feared that God's point of view and the family point of view are very far from identical in most cases. We fall into a sort of happy optimism in our families, which is marvellously unsuspecting of its own absurdity. We laugh at tombstones, and there is reason for it. They tell queer tales sometimes. Yet, after all, it is only the simple-heartedness of sorrow which thus promulges to a critical world what is really the judgment of all families upon their members. But, when we leave the home circle, which praise, exaggeration, blindness, and caress keep so warm and nest-like for us, what can the presence of God feel like, but a cold cutting east-wind, against which no furs and wrappers are adequate protection ? Oh how many saints are spoiled, how many souls unmanned, how many high things brought low, by the sweet effeminacies and ingenious adulations of domestic admiration and family worship ! Reality has no worse enemy than this sweetest and most enticing of deceptions. No

wonder the saints have always treated as unpardonable what looks to us the most pardonable of all delusions, because it is the most amiable,—the graceful blandishments and soothing flatteries of home.

Spiritual books are outward things, and they also can make us unreal. No soul spins a grosser web of self-deceit around itself, than the one that habitually reads spiritual books above its spiritual condition, or in any other way unfitted for its existing circumstances. Common states of prayer look uncommon to the man who is always reading books of mystical theology. Converts particularly are always mistaking common graces for uncommon ones. Indeed mystical theology can be made into a sham more easily than most things that are real. If we are for ever reading of pure and disinterested love of God, we readily come to think that our love for Him is such as we read of. Heroic thoughts are infectious, and we soon swell with them. But they will not do duty for heroic deeds. They only give an air of sentimentality to our religion, when we are not making any real effort to act upon them. When a spiritual book does not mortify us and keep us down, it is sure to puff us up and make us untruthful. Its doctrine gets into our head, and we commit follies. A man, who finds the popular commonplace spiritual books dull and unimpressive, has great reason to suspect his religious state altogether; and of one thing he may be quite confident, that his feeling of dulness in the common books shows he is not up to the level of high books.

Another way, in which we let ourselves be deceived by others, is by seeking guidance where we expect least contradiction. How honest hearts can be so dishonest as they are, is a mystery which meets us at every turn in the spiritual life; and here is one of the most glaring examples of it. The Church does not oblige us to have spiritual

directors. It imposes nothing more upon us than sacramental confession. If we put ourselves under a director, it is our own act. We do it, in order to gain some spiritual advantage by it. Who could believe that any one would go and entangle himself in a whole system of insincerity, and allow himself to be almost irrevocably lost in the bogs and fens of self-deceit, knowing all the while, as he must know, that his intentions are not godly, and his motives not of the right sort? Yet so it is. Men seek spiritual direction, partly that they may be deceived, and partly lest they should be awakened from their self-deceit. They look around. They fix upon the least independent judgment, or the least vigorous judgment, they can discern; and to that judgment they assign their spiritual direction. What they want is a ghostly father who will let them alone, who will hardly ever take the initiative, whose direction will confine itself to words, whose direction will be simply passive, whose yoke will be of outward observances rather than of inward strictness, who will caution rather than rouse, and hold them back rather than spur them forward. Yet is there any man, who has had anything whatever to do with souls, who was ever lucky enough to find one soul in a thousand which needed holding back? Now if the Church compelled us to have a spiritual director, it is quite intelligible that our clever corruption should seek for some venerable King Log, and set him over itself; but, as the whole thing is voluntary, is it not amazing we should take so much trouble for such very unsatisfactory results?

But, let us suppose our spiritual director chosen, how do we behave to him? Do we give him anything like fair play? I ought rather to say, Do we give our own poor souls anything like fair play with him? Can we ever remember having put one single question to him with perfect honesty and thorough straightforwardness? Have we not

always shaped it and worded it, and emphasised it, for some ulterior end? Have we not half made up our own minds on most subjects, before we have consulted our guide, and has not our aim rather been to elicit such a verdict as we wish, than to know his calm and dispassionate and uninfluenced judgment? All this is wild work: God being considered, and the soul, and eternal possibilities! In these days of railway frauds, we are always hearing of accounts being "*cooked*." Now I have no very clear idea of how to "cook" accounts, and should hardly know how to set about it, from want of experience in accounts altogether: but I greatly suspect that what we do with our statements to our spiritual directors is to "*cook*" them.

Am I bitter and sarcastic? If so, I assure you it is with much love, and the most earnest of intentions. I feel as if I wanted to do you some good, and could not get at you, as if there were a waving veil of cobwebs between your souls and my hand, and when I strike it, it yields, and waves about, and gets into my own eyes, and there is no tearing it. This is vexatious; and I do not know how far to be serious, lest, being serious, I should become angry also, So bear with my foolishness. See if I do not say some sensible things in the course of it, which if I had said gravely, would have been less sensible. I would give anything to do with you what I want. It would bring you a little nearer God. Do not be annoyed with my frivolous way of doing it. Yet perhaps you had better be a little angry. I am sure to be able to make you think, if I can put you moderately out of temper. You are out of temper now, because of what I have said of your intercourse with your directors. It is a sore subject. It is the soreness which has made you angry. But you know very well, that your spiritual direction is little better than a farce, and that it is so, because of your own unguineness with



your directors. Most of you had better have no directors, than direct your directors so adroitly as you do.

From spiritual directors I pass to the devil. Perhaps an abrupt transition : but not so, when you come to think of it. For when self-deceit gets to feed upon spiritual dainties, the evil one can never be very far off. This brings me to my next division, self deceived by Satan. It would require a separate dissertation to divide the blame, according to justice and equity, between self and Satan : so that part of the question shall go untouched. Satan deceives us in many ways, too many ways for us to enumerate now. He deceives us by instigating good men to over-praise us. These good men do it out of the abundance of their natural kindness, or on the compulsion of their charity, or from the self-vilification of their own humility. How little they suspect what they are doing ! Praise people as little as you can consistently with kindness ; for you never run a greater risk of doing the devil's work for him, than when you praise people. Nevertheless you must praise others sometimes. We cannot go on without it. Vanity is as universal a law of the mental and moral worlds, as gravitation is of the material. We shall all of us expire of inanition, if we are not praised. It is one of the gases necessary to action ; some of it we must have, the less the better.

Satan has also another power, of a much more serious kind. He can raise strange mists within our souls, disturbing and discolouring self. How he does it, I do not know ; but of the fact there is no doubt. I greatly suspect he could not do it, if we did not play into his hands in some way, and furnish him with the materials. The consequences, however, of this mist are terrific. Distances are confused, shapes swollen, light darkened, darkness lightened, what ought to be hidden shown, what ought to be shown hidden ; a complete *fata morgana* ! Disagreeable subject !

you all know it well enough. I must either say a great deal about it, or very little. So, as I have not the heart to say much, I shall now say no more.

Another of his wiles is to fill us with indiscreet and unseasonable aspirations: indiscreet, because they are out of all proportion to our grace, and unseasonable, because they are especially unbefitting our present condition. Strange to say! there is something congenial between grace and nature. Hence it is that certain forms of holiness come almost natural to a man, suit his disposition, elicit the excellences of his individual character, and transform his nature rather than supplant it. Then again there are other forms of holiness, which in particular souls seem to have occult affinities with evil. With them they are akin to temptations. They leave the weak places in the soul unguarded, and develop what rather requires subduing. They are not meant for those souls, but for others. Now all God's work everywhere is a work of order; and therefore the devil finds his account in disturbing this order; and in the spiritual life, he cannot more effectually accomplish this than by filling devout people with indiscreet and unseasonable aspirations.

A mischief, which is confined to ourselves, is a very great mischief. But it is not half so bad as a mischief which compromises us with others. The last tends to the irremediable. Nothing is positively irremediable out of hell. The worst evil never gets beyond the tendency to be so. But this tendency is bad enough. Now see how the devil draws us on beyond mere aspirations. He entangles us in unsuitable good works. Why, one might almost prefer a sin to this. Observe the *almost*, if you please. There is nothing like an unsuitable good work for keeping us back from God. It enlists against Him all that is best and least

selfish in our nature. Set an active soul to contemplate, and one of two results will follow, hypochondria or worldliness. Immerse a contemplative soul in business, and you will have either melancholy or delusion. Bend a person to much mental prayer, when they ought to be spinning at home, or bustling about in the garrets of the poor, and you will produce a self-righteous, inflated, stupefied simulation of interior holiness, which would ruffle the good humour of an angel. Keep a soul in hospitals or on ladies' committees, which ought to be alone with God, and although the evil you do by it will be less than in the former case, you will frustrate the soul's vocation, risk its salvation, and indirectly spoil a good many plans of charitable beneficence.

Last of all, our spiritual enemy is always enticing us to speed. This is the fatallest of fatal things. Are there any of you, who once were different from what you are now? Are there any who mourn over a delicacy of conscience which has grown callous and hard, over the cold ash-strewn hearth, where the flames of divine love once burned but are now extinct, over a nearness of God which has gone back like an ebb tide down the sands, over a hundred great graces once within reach, but now mere words never to have realities? If it is so, has it not for the most part been speed which has done all the mischief? There are few saints more remarkable in the history of spiritual theology than St. Francis of Sales. He is a kind of French Revolution in spirituality. It is hard to see where he got all his traditions from. Many, we know, were from St. Philip. But the connection between modern society and his modest innovations is very striking. We seem to see exactly for what ends he was raised up, and of what he was the apostle. There is an originality about him, as an ascetical writer, which ought to be well weighed. But could we select any

one thing he was sent to teach us, which is more remarkable than the duty and the wisdom of slowness? He teaches as one from God, seldom giving reasons for what he teaches, and when he does give them, somehow the reasons have nothing like the divine cogency of his axioms. Fenelon's letters are St. Francis of Sales reasoned out, the bishop of Geneva with the metaphysics put into him, and perhaps something of the saint left out. To be slow, this is what St. Francis and Fenelon teach, and what you must learn. There are endless reasons for it. I will only mention the one which connects the duty with the avoidance of self-deceit. It is this: speed, in spiritual matters, is always followed by darkness.

The power of the kingdom of sin rests simply in self-deceit. The picture, you think, is gloomy. I grant it. Yet not disheartening. It is the old story. You will not serve God out of love, and then you abuse preachers for unsettling you. You want unsettling. I wish I could unsettle you. I wish you had the grace to be unsettled. Digging does good. It loosens roots, and lets in sun and rain. What can be more vexatious than an obstinate shrub which will not grow? It always reminds me of souls,—so stiff, and concentrated, and dull, and pert, and self-satisfied in its yellow primness. A simple childlike love of Jesus always goes safely through these dangers of self-deceit, almost without being aware of their existence. There is something intensely sickly about the spiritual life. It is nothing but unbandaging, examining sores, bandaging them up again, smelling-salts, rooms with blinds down, and I know not what dishonourable invalidisms and tottering convalescences. It seems to me no slight temptation to love God with a headlong love, in order that one's soul may not be sickened with these degrading symptoms or valetudinarian

sensations of the spiritual life, but live a robust, out-of-doors kind of religious existence. Yet many people like to be ill, especially to be ill in mind. It shows how little the thought of God is in them; for that thought, grave, kindly, sober, earnest, is an inexorable exorcism of all sickness.

*SELF-DECEIT.*

## III.

## THE VARIETIES OF SELF-DECEIT.

IF the varieties of grace are numberless, the varieties of self-deceit are well nigh able to match them. We shall get a step further into our disagreeable subject by glancing at some of these varieties, selecting those which we meet with most commonly in daily life. There are in fact seven species, which we may name the fundamental self-deceits, as one or other of them seems to lie at the bottom of every possible modification of delusion.

There is, first of all, the self-deceit which takes no advice. Everyone knows that the delusions of the spiritual life are so amazing as to be incredible. A man neglects the duties which God has given him to do, and spends all his day in church, and yet imagines himself a special favourite of God. Even monks and nuns can mistake singularity for perfection. There is a false modesty, and a false humility, a deluded penance and a deluded prayer. Delusion is everywhere, and yet to us looking on, it is unaccountable how the victim does not at once see through the delusion. Now, in a great number of cases, all these worlds of delusion are created by the self-deceit which takes no advice. Taciturnity has its good points. Who can doubt it? Silence is more often expedient than speech in a world so extremely foolish



as ours is. Then there are some dispositions, which are not at all tempted to talk, but tempted—for it is a veritable temptation—to hold their tongues. These are men who, unlike Solomon, have never happened on a right time to speak. So they make plans, either with no counsellors but themselves, or with only such as they know to be at best but selves at second hand. Their plans grow into them, and length of time is mistaken for maturity of deliberation. These plans twinkle and oscillate through their prayers, and so at least seem to have the light of a quasi-divine sanction upon them; and with all conceivable respectability, and without one external admonitory symptom of self-seeking, these men have at last come to mistake self-opinionatedness for judicious reserve, through the self-deceit which takes no advice. This form of self-deceit tends very rapidly to become incurable; and when it has once taken hold of a man, he can only be roused up by a rare miracle of grace, and most often is not roused up at all.

Then there is a self-deceit, which is always taking advice, and, what is perhaps worse, always taking it of everybody. This vice belongs to men who have as many directors as a king has privy counsellors, men whose weakness of character is such that they publish their plans in confidence to every one they meet, and have to end, as it were, of sheer necessity, by taking no advice at all, because the persuasions on the right hand are so completely neutralised by the dissuasions on the left hand, that the man's mind becomes almost a blank. These are the men, we see them daily, who are always undertaking things, and who never succeed in anything they undertake. Yet this universal confidence reposed in all mankind is not only consistent with the most mulish obstinacy, but is not unfrequently an actual development of it. Among English people obstinacy and weakness almost always go together. Who ever saw a weak man who

was not obstinate, a weak man who was really docile, and did not find out at last that he was not an Englishman? This perpetual and indiscriminate voracity of advice is also a form of self-importance; and who ever knew a weak man of any nation who was not self-important? But when we regard this endless seeking of counsel as a delusion, as one of the varieties of self-deceit, we soon discover that no little dishonesty mingles with its weakness. A man, who is always asking advice, suspects himself of being in the wrong, even if he does not go further than suspicion. A real uneasiness of conscience lies at the bottom of it all; and consequently, if he is not trying to make himself comfortable in a state of things which he half knows ought to make him uncomfortable, there is something more or less hopeful in his case, even in spite of the dishonesty. For, a grain or two less of dishonesty, and the suspicion might become a salutary self-distrust. Yet in order that this process may take place, it is necessary that he should hold his tongue. But here is the difficulty. For the more he talks and asks and communicates, the more the dishonesty grows. He is throwing dust in his own eyes at every word. The more obstinate he grows, the more eloquently is he persuading himself of his own docility. Every additional counsellor makes him less able to discern the truth. Every step he takes brings him nearer to the doing of his own will. Some men are snares to others; this man is a snare to himself. At last complete confusion ensues, and the total eclipse of self-ignorance, and the chaos of entangled vacillation. The man's life may now be pronounced a decided failure, as a life; but his salvation of course remains possible, and if a man saves his soul, we may be content to let him fail in all else. Besides, of what good to the world would any success have been which such a man could by any possibility have achieved?

Then we have for our third variety the complacent self-deceit. Where this exists, it seems born with a man. Nevertheless we need not despair of straightening even the twists we bring with us into the world, though it is a more difficult matter than straightening what outward circumstances, and even habitual sins, have bent. Some men have a strong faith in themselves, which no number of mistakes or misfortunes can shake. Experience is unpersuasive to them. Practically speaking, their own infallibility is the fixed point of their compass. Whatever else moves, that cannot move. Whatever else is called in question, that must not be. There is always a quiet optimism about them. It is quiet, because it cannot conceive the possibility of doubting itself. There is an external reason for every failure, which no foresight could have calculated, and against which no prudence could have guarded. If what they have done was not simply and absolutely the best thing, it was the best for the time and place and circumstances. Indeed they consider themselves entitled to additional credit, precisely because they consented to waive the best thing, and humble themselves to circumstances with the wise condescension of discretion. These are men with whom all tokens are providential, and all interpositions miraculous. They fail without knowing that they fail, because all things look so providential in their particular case. They see the government of the whole world before them as in a panorama, of which they are the centre. Their affairs are God's final causes. Their piety takes the shape of inspirations, and what is natural about them has a ruinous tendency to extravasate into the supernatural. Their devotion can never run long in a common groove, nor indeed in any one groove at all. Their dreams even sometimes become motives of action. Hence they are wayward and changeable. They are not only receiving inspirations every moment, but even

cross inspirations. But they take this very easily, almost as if it were a feature of divine guidance. They see no difficulty in the matter. What is change in others is no change to them. In truth they are so unchangeably changeable, that it is quite easy for them to believe themselves consistent, systematic, and lovers of principle, when everybody else thinks them not to be depended on in the commonest matter. Such men listen to advice with all the composure of self-righteousness, with almost a pathetic appearance of patience, as if they were carrying a cross, and sharing in the mortifications of the saints. For how improper to advise them! Their position, their name, their antecedents, all should have guaranteed them from the impertinent simplicity of advice; and the quarter from which the advice has come is just the quarter from which it ought not to have come. But they bear it with admirable meekness, remembering how hidden and unsuspected all goodness for the most part is in this naughty world. Perhaps we may say of these men, without offending charity, that they are not very likely candidates for the honours of canonisation. Yet perhaps a great number of them expect their lives will be written.

But we have another form of self-deceit, which is censorious. There are men who are always so sure they are in the right, that they set themselves up as a standard by which to judge others. So undoubting is their self-confidence, that they are not conscious they are making any uncommon claim to the confidence of others, when they thus put themselves forward as a standard. To abstain to do so would in their estimation be an act of false humility. As a man lives a man's life all the day long without particularly adverting to the fact that he is not an angel or a beast, but simply a man, so these persons are judging others all the day long, without adverting to it, as if they came into the world for the sole and express purpose of judging others,

and the wonder would be if they did anything else. They would rather advert to the exception of not judging, than to the continuity of censoriousness which makes up their life. But, while the complacent self-deceivers habitually reflect with pleasure on their own being in the right, the less amiable, though really more practical, censorious self-deceivers prefer to contemplate with satisfaction the fact that others are in the wrong. The latter therefore are less to be loved, while at the same time there is much more real work to be got out of them. It is astonishing how accurate their unfavourable judgments of others are. It is as if practice conferred a skill upon uncharitableness, which gave it almost the unerringness of a science. Thus they make fewer mistakes than the complacent self-deceivers. For the world is really a very bad world, and most people are in the wrong; and there is a kind of reputation to be got by always prophesying dismal things, and a kind of influence to be obtained by frightening others with our sarcasm and detraction, and even a kind of success, which to an unamiable man is better than none, in getting out of the way of a scrape into which others fall. Few men, even among good men, aim at anything high in life, and a few crumbs of success are nourishment enough to souls that can swallow a sea of flattery. These censorious men are generally calm and tranquil, because of the unshaken placidity of their self-confidence. Hence they have for the most part a great dislike of enthusiasm. It is contrary to the genius of the critical spirit to be enthusiastic. A man's heart gets cold if he does not keep it warm by living in it; and a censorious man is one who ordinarily lives out of his own heart. In matters of religious detail these men have an instinctive aversion to liberty of spirit, and while they indulge themselves to a dangerous amount in liberty of practice, they are severe upon liberty of spirit in others.

They are men who cannot easily understand what another man can inwardly be like who acts from love ; and hence they think liberty of spirit to be only an unblushing proclamation of that infrequency of prayer, perfunctoriness of examination of conscience, and tepidity of sorrow for sin, which they themselves keep secret as the realities of their own interior life. A rigorous theology is one of the cheapest modes of respectability ; and he, who represents the road to heaven as hard to others, is most probably leading an easy life himself. A censorious man is either under the voluptuous dominion of self-indulgence, or the unworthy subjection of human respect. Yet this is one of the commonest forms of self-deceit. It is, moreover, hard to cure, because its heart is inaccessible. It seems almost to require the shock of a great sin, which, by shattering the lordly edifice of self-respect, may let in upon the soul the light of salutary shame.

There is a fifth variety of self-deceit, which is ambitious. Ambition aims at a distant object, which can only be obtained slowly. Yet it is by no means a patient quality. While it needs patience perhaps more than any other vice does, it has by no means a fair share of it. It is a quick, impetuous, impatient passion, perpetually over-reaching itself in its calculations, and peculiarly liable to mistake the means for the end. This ambitious self-deceit confounds single actions with formed habits ; and if by a more than common impulse of grace a man has been able in one instance to do something generous for God, this self-deceit leads him to suppose that he has already acquired a saintly habit, towards which this action has been the first step only. Contrary experience irritates rather than undeceives him. He grows petulant with God. He has adopted practices of devotion which are above the level of his attainments. He has ventured upon a familiarity in prayer, which he con-



ceived suited to his perfection, but which has been in his case, however holy in itself, simply prejudicial to his reverence. He dares to speak complainingly to God. He would fain contemplate, without the previous pains of assiduous meditation. He would love suffering, but he has spared himself in the matter of bodily mortification. He would serve God with a purely disinterested love, but he has never been half sorry enough for his sins. He passed through the earlier stages of the spiritual life at a bound, and leaped into high things, and has starved his soul upon mysticism when he would have grown fat upon common piety. Here is altogether a very incurable case, and not a very uncommon one! But what is the man's end? He began by imitating the saints in what was inimitable, and he ends by giving up religion under discouragement. He commenced by being voracious of the supernatural, and he finishes by finding the common exercise of faith a difficult attainment.

Then there is the self-deceit which is scrupulous. It is odious to have to speak of it. The older we get, the less good can we see in scruples. Experience and age both convince us that the look of respectability, which we once thought there was about scrupulous men, was a mere delusion. They all turn out badly. Huge continents of puerile conceit are being discovered in their souls every year. They are eaten up with that unassuming assumption, which is the most wicked of all the varieties of censoriousness. Their selfish pusillanimity is intolerable. They are a pest which religious society might almost blamelessly combine to get rid of by summary extinction. Their good is all on the surface, and wears no better than the bloom on a plum. This is a form of self-deceit which Satan very much affects. It does his work as he would have it done. It perversely fixes its attention on wrong things, that is, on things which

it need not particularly attend to, and it does this exclusively. Meanwhile it is perfectly unscrupulous in things which are a scandal, or a ruling passion, or an occasion of sin, or a besetting temptation. On the whole, it pays very little attention to its behaviour to others, or to their feelings. It is snappish, and sour, and uncongenial, and intractable; and all this foolish people sometimes put down to sanctity. It has in its nature a deep well of tranquil self-exaltation, and on the surface it has the fidgets in religion. It has never done any good in its lifetime, and never will do any; but it has made such a noise about the good it was one day going to do, that it has got more credit for its intentions than a man often gets who quietly does the real work. These are tiresome men, good to try our tempers, but otherwise such as we like to know of only at a distance, as possible, probable, or actual, like the wild beasts in Africa. A man, who has duties to such people, is unfortunately placed in life.

Lastly, there is the self-deceit which is falsely humble. It has a great affinity to the scrupulous self-deceit, but perhaps comes more near to be incurable. It is true that self-deceit is a mark both of intellectual and moral weakness. But then there are few characters in the world which have not at least one point, at which they are both intellectually and morally weak. With some the intellectual weakness comes from the moral; with most the moral comes from the intellectual. We must not therefore be surprised at finding apparently strong and clear characters, which are nevertheless the victims of this extremely foolish self-deceit which arises from false humility. Every one feels that humility is pre-eminently the saintly virtue, and therefore every one aims at mastering it. But it is uncommonly difficult to master, while it seems almost impossible to nature to go on believing itself so little good as it must believe itself, so

long as it believes itself not to be humble. Hence something must be done in order to shorten the process of its acquisition. Unfortunately some of the saints have occasionally spoken ill of themselves. Whereupon we also will speak ill of ourselves, not in the least believing what we say, and still less conceding any right to others to believe us. Every man in the world has his little circle of flatterers, just as an insect has its parasites. These are either foolish enough or insincere enough to be pleased with our self-abuse; and we, finding it a cheap heroism, are by no means economical in the matter. But this self-abuse has a remarkable tendency to produce spiritual blindness. It does not seem to be so much a disease superinduced upon the soul's eye, as a positive wearing away of that by which alone the soul can see at all, a destruction of its very power of seeing. Its blindness is complete when it has come to believe, as it does at last, what it says against itself, and what it began to say only from conceit and affectation. A man in this state is ignorant of that, which of all things in the spiritual life it is most necessary for him to know, his own want of courage. This is because his false humility never allows him to try himself. He thinks, in his artificial self-abjection, which has now become real without becoming true, that he ought only to attempt low things for God; and therefore he does what is below his strength, without trying what is level with it or above it. Yet, mean-spirited as it grows, this self-deceit is not without a kind of pride in its safety and discretion, while it does not see at all its peculiarly odious form of ungenerosity. All deluded souls will be much surprised at the day of judgment, but we should imagine the greatest and most painful surprise of all is that which awaits the soul self-deceived by false humility.

These are the seven varieties of self-deceit, with which

direction has to deal, with such patience as it can command, fighting manfully with irritability and despair. There are, however, manifold interminglings of these varieties, which are the greatest puzzle in spiritual direction, and also the greatest tortures which self can inflict on self. There is in fact no entanglement in creation like the entanglement of self-deceit; and there is this peculiarity about all its varieties, that they are all of them swift diseases tending to become so very soon and at such early stages very difficult to cure.

*SELF-DECEIT.*

## IV.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-DECEIT.

It requires some amount of pious bravery to go on making a more and more intimate acquaintance with this offensive phenomenon of our fallen nature. But it is of incalculable consequence to us to do so. I feel that I have tried your patience, and that I have no right to expect you to listen to me with more than a half-angry forbearance. Yet I cannot help hoping that we are both of us getting very earnest in the matter: and, after all, do you not find that there is always a peculiar pleasantness in everything we do for God, no matter how we shrink from the thing in itself? We are very bad, full of littleness, full of inconsequence, and very foolish; and in nothing do we show our foolishness more than in the matters of the spiritual life. When we meet with an accident, we are not exactly angry with the surgeon who sets the broken limb and washes the gravel out of the wound, and makes us tremble with pain while he does it. Yet there is perhaps a dash of anger toward him in our mind, and without any reason at all we think a greater degree of skill would have inflicted a lesser degree of pain. Yet this feeling continues only while the pain has risen for a moment above bearing-point. So, when we are inclined to be angry with our directors, which we all of us

very often are, and a reasonable director expects it at our hands, we must endeavour only to be angry with him as we are with our surgeon. A hurt man is almost inevitably angry. It is foolish to be angry with him for being so. So if you begin to ask yourselves why I have chosen this repulsive subject, why I dwell upon it so long, and why I sometimes seem to speak banteringly on what must be so serious if it be only as much as half true, you will soon get more angry with me than is expedient for yourselves. I have tried to do a disagreeable thing in the least disagreeable way I could; but whatever must be disagreeable at best, always seems unnecessarily and wantonly disagreeable. Nevertheless, however unreasonable and petulant we may all of us be, we are really in earnest with God, and are content to force our way through the remainder of our investigation with the hope of something for His glory coming out of it at the last. This, you see, is nothing but a piece of self-defence, probably containing some amount of self-deceit. If you perceive it I shall be more pleased than ashamed; for you will listen to me less fretfully when you see how I fall under my own lash. When a man makes a fool's cap for others, it always looks more at home on his own head than on theirs.

We have spoken of the varieties of self-deceit. Yet we cannot dispense ourselves from a scrutiny of the characteristics of all self-deceit, as such. In the last section we split it into subdivisions; now we must regard it again in its unity as a coherent and consistent whole. The first characteristic of self-deceit which strikes us is its seemingly boundless power, as compared with other temptations, which by their own nature are more partial. Indeed it is something more than a temptation. It appears to be a law of our soul's infirmity, a law inevitable to our present condition, and which grace itself cannot altogether repeal. For, just



as matter and body have their inseparable infirmities, so spirit and soul have theirs. Its genius is universal, and thus, like the air, gives no warning of its presence. Temptations follow in the train of certain circumstances, and those circumstances warn us of the temptation that is bearing down upon us, just as the sudden darkening of the sea-fog in one place warns the navigator that an iceberg is approaching. But self-deceit is everywhere. It is a sort of caricature of grace. It goes before and it follows after; it suggests conduct, and it confers perseverance; it underlies our actions like the earth, or overarches them like the sky; it walks by the side of them, or it fuses itself into them; it praises them in self-love; it reproaches them out of a false conscience; it gives us a light to see by, and the light blinds us; the two opposite states of activity and repose are equally suited for its operations; it hides itself and shows itself with alternations as indistinguishable as the vibrations of a humming-bird's wings. Intolerable companion! always in step, never fatigued, indifferent to hill or vale, to wood or swamp, to town or field, to land or sea, for ever invisibly mocking and mimicking the gait of our beloved Guardian Angel, and entrapping us into blind plots to baffle the intelligent kindness of that dear fraternal Spirit! Life becomes irritating with this consciousness attached to it. No one can bear to be dogged. Moreover this self-deceit is always triumphant, always on the laugh, always making game of us. Change as we will in natural things, we are equally its prey. Nay it almost grows with our grace. Grace gives it new opportunities, fresh theatres, and opens to its spiteful glee a delighted diversity of fresh experiments. I believe that there is often more self-deceit in a religious than in a secular; yet I suppose it is the grandest thing in the world to be a religious. Most aggravating self-deceit! It is so elastic; who can punish it? To try to do

so is like whipping the air. It is such a confirmed optimist ; who ever humbled it ? It is almost embarrassed by its own success. But let us keep up our spirits, and be hopeful. We shall see by and bye that this, like other dark subjects, has a bright side also, bright enough, even if not very bright.

A second characteristic of self-deceit is its deep-seated inveteracy. Repeated victories over it seem to give us no habit of victory over it. No amount of mortification seems to cow it. On the contrary, all the measures taken against it appear to invigorate it. It finds its way everywhere, and flies under pressure, unharmed and whole as quicksilver. It cannot be gathered up, held fast, submitted to any operation, or detached from the various circumstances of life. One moment concentrated, and the next moment diffused, it baffles all pursuit. Vigilance does little to help us. To watch it makes us wise about it, as watching the stars helps us in theorising about them, while it gives us no control over them in their paths. We never grow expert in our warfare with it, because it hardly ever attacks us twice quite in the same manner. Indeed attack is a wrong word to use. Even stratagem hardly expresses the peculiarly quiet initiative, which self-deceit takes in all things. It is passive, or rather active in the same way in which any corrosive matter is active. It does not affect war, but peace. It wants to live quietly in our lives, or rather to live our lives for us, and be a kind of soul to us. It is this peculiarity which enables it to be so inveterate. Many bad things are inveterate in us, but none are so inveterate as this.

Then, in the next place, we must note its ability to put on the appearance of good. No wonder the devil's prime minister should possess so much of the devil's chief talent. Yet we hardly do justice to this characteristic of self-deceit,

when we call it an ability to assume the disguise of virtue. For it always wears it. It is its normal state, its law of gravitation, something essential to its being. If it looked evil we should never be deceived by it. I hope there are few men in the world who deliberately, and without the disturbing force of passion or temptation, choose evil with the certainty that it is evil, and in spite of that certainty. I do not believe that any creature out of hell chooses evil because it is evil. But even if it were so, there is no self-deceiving here. It is the hardness and audacity of conscious malice. Self-deceit is that which makes us do the devil's work, believing, though not always with an entirely honest faith, that it is God's. The incomparable perfection with which self-deceit can put on endless disguises, and hardly ever be found out in any of them, is the grand characteristic of its inauspicious genius. How it can look persuasive in startling attitudes, and natural in novel positions—alas! we all know too well. It is a thing we can never sufficiently admire. It were to be wished that our fear was always equal to our admiration. There would be a much lower average of shipwrecks among immortal souls.

But it has a weak point. There is comfort in the thought. This weak point is another of its characteristics. This is its soreness when touched, though it is for the most part very hard to touch. It escapes unharmed from our touch, but it sensibly winces under the pain of it. There are some noxious creatures in creation which by sound, or odour, or the betrayal of some other animal, are mercifully compelled to disclose their dangerous proximity to us. This is one of the footprints of God's love in natural history. Now this characteristic of self-deceit is a parallel case. There are a hundred dangers in self-deceit, it would have been truer to have said a thousand, but none of them is so great as its concealment. Hence the compassion of its being made to

betray itself by its sensitiveness when touched. We have all of us certain ways, practices, habits, attitudes, tricks of conduct, which no one can blame us for without putting us out of temper. We ourselves hardly know why it should be so. Why should we be so unmoved when an unfriendly tongue touches some mode or manifestation of our conceit, and explode like gunpowder when it touches some other, which is neither more guilty, nor, which is to be chiefly considered from this point of view, more disgraceful or more ridiculous? We cannot tell. Very often we cannot analyse it, when our attention is called to it. Generally speaking, it is a betrayal of self-deceit, a discovery of the utmost moment to us, and one to be fearlessly followed up without delay. This sensitiveness of self-deceit is a fortunate characteristic of the vice, or rather an ingenuity of providence. It is the rattle in the snake's tail, sounding when for the snake's purpose it should be silent. Let us take care to search the bush whenever we hear the rattle. Half our bites would have been saved, if we had always done so.

The co-existence of self-deceit with so much good is another of its characteristics. It has a genius for alliances. All are natural to it, and fall in with its purposes, and extend its influence. Its power of combination is incredible, until observation and experience bring it home to us. It can amalgamate with things which have apparently repugnant, or even antagonistic, qualities. But it tends especially to ally itself with good. It selects the best of everything, and fastens by predilection on that which is most excellent. In many instances good drowns evil, when by the help of grace it comes to be in excess. But the quantity of good only freshens self-deceit, while on the other hand the smallest quantity of its poison disturbs the greatest quantity of good, and a moderate quantity of the evil is able even to neutralise an enormously disproportionate amount of good. Hypocrisy

is generally shortlived, unless it has some amount of piety along with it. So self-deceit purposely abides in the neighbourhood of good, in order to be fostered and kept warm. Thus we have always to regard the amount of our grace as some index to the amount of our self-deceit, and this is in itself a disheartening consideration. Akin to this characteristic, perhaps simply a manifestation of it, we must notice also that quiet partnership with the sacraments into which this deceit intrudes itself. There is even a peculiar form of it belonging to frequent confession; and our corruption can make frequent communion an actual hotbed of self-deceit. I dare not go further into these questions, unless I went into them completely, and, if it were possible, exhaustively; and therefore I content myself with this dismal indication of them.

Self deceit increases with our age. This is another of its characteristics. Some weeds grow in our souls by what appears a chance. Others die, if peculiar circumstances do not nurture them. Some are planted there by a single act of sin, an act which had neither parents or children, neither antecedents or consequences, so far as we can see; and they remain hardly green, barely not dead, and never grow at all. But self-deceit is an inevitable growth. The broadening of life is the widening of our faculties for deceiving ourselves. Simplicity is the only thing which is fatal to self-deceit. If we could be perfectly simple, we could inflict a mortal wound upon the monster. But life multiplies things. It entangles our motives. It distracts our attention. It complicates our daily conduct. It bewilders us by its rapidity, its versatility, its contradictoriness, its imperiousness, its fertility. All these things are prolific of new possibilities for self-deceit; and self-deceit fills them as air fills a vacuum, silently if allowed its own way and time, with a report if compelled to act suddenly and under distress. Only of this we may be sure,

that the fountain flows more copiously each succeeding year, and that unless grace is evaporating the waters as they spring, life is but a match between grace and self-deceit, in which the latter will be victorious; and all that grace can do is to delay the hour of its own defeat. It is one of those operations of grace which must be a complete one in order to be decisively triumphant. In almost all its other operations grace has a fair triumph even in comparative failure. But I doubt if it is so here.

But what is true in the life of nature is true also in the life of grace. For it is another characteristic of self-deceit, that its energies are quickened as people rise higher in the spiritual life. It has always been a melancholy truth, which no experienced ascetic has ever thought of gainsaying, that the higher operations of grace are more subject to delusion than the lower, except the very highest, which have to do with the soul's uttermost union with God. This arises from their being more out of proportion with our infirmity and vileness; while those highest operations of all are nearly exempt from delusion, because although they are still more disproportioned to our littleness, they bring with them more sovereign succours and more overwhelming transformations of grace. We are more easily able to manage common grace; and the highest graces easily manage us, because they liken us to themselves. But the higher graces, which stand midway, are replete with delusions precisely because they are not high enough to counterbalance of themselves the disproportioned weight they lay upon us. Very few, even of those aiming at perfection, rise above these middle graces. Hence it is practically the common rule, that, the higher men rise in the spiritual life, the more subject they become to the insidious operations of self-deceit. Interior mortifications are higher than bodily mortifications, and they are especially liable to this deceit. The broad fact of bodily pain is some-



thing palpable to feel our way by, and the pain itself disabuses us of as much self-deceit as the infliction of it can bring into us. But it is not so with the higher mortifications. So with prayer. The more nearly it comes to the confines of what is passive, the more liable it is to delusions. So with peculiar or definite prayers, such as to be thought ill of; they furnish us with endless opportunities of going wrong, even while they open almost interminable avenues of grace. However, there is a sort of collateral consolation in this. The growth of self-deceit *may* be an index of growth in holiness; and in a land of such Egyptian darkness even what looks like light cheers the eye; and a chance almost has the value of a reality when all chance seemed gone.

But this is not all. Self-deceit seems actually to thrive on prayer, and to grow fat on contemplation. Prayer leads us into a new world, a world where a different language is spoken, where the forms of the scenery are different, and seen in a differently tinted atmosphere. We are not used to this, and easily make mistakes. There are no deceptions in nature to compare with those of light. We misjudge distances and sizes; we see things inverted, and even discern things which have nothing but a fantastical existence. It is a principle no less true in theology than in natural science, that light only gets colour by shining through darkness. In the world of prayer there are colours which we cannot easily assign rightly to the object or the atmosphere; there are splendours which dazzle, and which by dazzling mislead. Habit is the only safety with supernatural things, and by the time we become habituated to one set of supernatural objects the ascensions of grace have raised us into another. In the spiritual life we are always changing our sphere. It would not be life, but stagnation, were it otherwise. This is not the place to enter upon so large a subject; but it would not be difficult to show that all the phenomena of

prayer, its dangers, its peculiarities, its reactions on the soul, its associations, and even its blessings, are singularly capable of affording nutriment to self-deceit. As a matter of fact, no man who has watched himself well, has failed to observe the way in which prayer, regarded as a habit, is beset by self-deceit.

In connection with this, we must notice another of its characteristics, which is the opportune and instantaneous manner in which it seizes on fresh graces, and diverts them to its own ends. The power of a temptation is mostly in its timeliness. With a nature so weak as ours, so peculiarly unable to withstand surprises, that which is well-timed, either for good or evil, is almost irresistible. The empire of self-deceit rests in no slight degree upon the way in which it times every move. It is cautious and calculating, clear of eye and patient of temper. It never precipitates anything. It is never before its time, as the passions so often are. For the passions are continually overreaching their own ends, and baffling themselves by the animal vehemence of their impulses. They succeed rather by their obstinacy than by their skill. But self-deceit is delicate, diplomatic, noiseless, wary even in its swiftness, and does everything to a nicety. It works like a chemist, cleanly, finely, measuredly, and for the most part minutely. Its very gracefulness is the grace of a man who is conscious that he is intruding, and must make a title out of his manner. Then, when this timeliness of self-deceit is applied to the increments of grace which we are continually receiving, the danger and misery of our position become obvious. We seem to be in receipt of a good income, for our dividends are both regular and large. But in truth it is not all our own. Self-deceit levies a large income tax, and it is paid insensibly as our new graces come, so that we never know how much less rich we are than we seem to be. Only we know that we are considerably poorer.

The discreet management of our grace is one of the most difficult subjects in the spiritual life. We must have Conferences on it some Lent or other.\* Here it is enough to record it as a grievous and distasteful fact, that self-deceit does in fact take the bloom off our fresh graces as they come, so that our pining souls hardly ever taste a grace in all its own unhandled freshness. The fruit has been fingered, and the sugar in it has begun to ferment.

Thus self-deceit infests nature, and it infests grace. At one moment it is busy in one of these worlds, at the next moment in the other. Hence it is another of its characteristics that it is, in some persons habitually, and in others at particular times, almost indistinguishable from natural character. I have said before, that it is an inevitable growth: but a growth of what? Truly, of natural character, in a subject weakened, unhinged, and overbalanced by sin. Thus there is a necessary connection between our natural character and our own mode of self-deceit, although it would be as intolerable as untrue to confound the two things together. Yet this connection enables it, not only to time itself to our weak moments and to fasten on our weak points, but also to assume the look of our disposition so completely, that we may be unable to recognise ourselves. Then here is the danger. Almost every man considers his natural character, or some part of it, to be practically a necessity to him. He concedes to his disposition at least a limited right to lay down the law to him. He cannot resist this; he cannot overcome that. He assumes these as acknowledged facts in his government of himself, or rather management of himself. For unluckily self-government is little else but management. Here we arrive at that fountain of self-dispensation upon which so many souls make shipwreck, who cannot discern between

\* These Conferences on the Management of Grace have now been delivered. Lent of 1858.

want of trust in nature and want of trust in grace, between confidence in self and confidence in God. Then self-deceit intervenes, and with an adroitness, which we should admire if it were less pernicious in its effects, insinuates itself into the privileged parts of our character, into the dispositions we have made up our minds to humour, and so becomes our law of life. We lie to ourselves, and make that lie our law. We had better say no more on that head.

We have to add to the characteristics of self-deceit, already enumerated, the manifoldness of its forms. We might almost say that its forms are as countless as the insects of the earth, and that each form is a species by itself. So versatile and so individual is each man's self-deceit. It is as it were the essence of the subtlety of evil in each man's mind, combining with everything: and no two of its combinations are alike. Who can ever learn thoroughly a spirit so protean as this?

The invisible and distracting speed of its changes is another of its characteristics, intimately connected with the former. Who could pursue the electrical stream as it runs round the earth twenty-two times in a second? Yet self-deceit could outstrip it far in speed. There are no measures to the speed of thought. There are few thoughts gifted with such speed of self-originating logic as those by which we daily deceive ourselves.

To this we must also add the humiliatingness of self-deceit. There is a shame quite peculiar to the tight thralldom in which it holds us, whenever we come to perceive it. There are no men who shrink more instinctively from self-knowledge, than those who have once detected themselves in self-deceit. They cannot bear that shame over again. The detection has changed them in some respects. They are better men for it. Yet in some other respects, unless they have great grace, they are worse

men also for the self-conviction. As men say at insurance offices, they are better lives, but their health is no better. This is especially the case with beginners in the spiritual life. When they are first turned loose into the grand prairies of asceticism and the vast forests of meditation, they fall into spiritual gluttony, and mistake unwieldiness for growth in robustness. They ought to have been sent out, as we used to hear in old years of farmers turning their cows into clover fields, with tight girths of rope round their stomachs lest they should eat till they burst. Then by this gluttony men find themselves out. All habits of lying are humiliating : what must self-lying be ? So they give up the whole matter in disgust, and turn moderate, and take to comfort, and lead unsatisfactory lives, and go to purgatory for years to expiate their discretion. The end of some is farther and more fatal than that. A man always thinks he must change himself when he changes his circumstances, or change his whole self when he is called upon to change any part of himself. This is why men are always puzzling us by contradicting their antecedents. This is why lawyers are so inaccurate when they turn authors, and mathematicians talk so badly. So with these poor fellows, whom the shame of self-deceit drives into a life where there is no possibility of hypocrisy, because there is no show of piety.

There is one characteristic more, which results from a contemplation of all the others. It is the peculiar antagonism to God which distinguishes self-deceit. He is absolute truth : it is the meanest falsehood. He is simplicity : it is confusion. He is light ; it is darkness. He is merciful : it is unsparing. It belongs to us as creatures, not yet transformed into His image. It is the grand complicated result of sin. It works against God, under ground and above ground, in every soul and at every turn. It enables nature to taint grace. It teaches sin how to avoid repentance.

Its apostolate is to dissuade from perfection. It shifts the rudders of lives, and sets them on rocks or on the sands. It is the source of almost all the bad steering in life, and it is no slight proportion of wrecks which are attributable to bad steering. It takes the bloom off God's glory which it cannot steal. It spoils deathbeds, and then dies happy.

Moreover this is a domestic enemy, who can never be put to death while we live ourselves, but, amid all other trials, and in addition to them, is to be held down in an uncomfortable, struggling captivity. Everything is food to it. Poisons nourish it. Mortifications strengthen it. Prayer fattens it. Sacraments make it bright and happy. There is but one way to deal with it, which is to starve it; and the danger is, lest, while we starve it, we starve our own souls also. Well may we pine for childlike simplicity and royal truth. God is true, and every man a liar. Yet consolation is in sight. There is one other characteristic of self-deceit: we have enumerated fifteen; this will make the sixteenth. It is, that there is one thing, and one only, with which self-deceit appears to be *nearly* incompatible, or with which at least it can only be combined by being immensely weakened; and that is abiding sorrow for sin, the beautiful grace of contrition.



*SELF-DECEIT.*

## V.

## THE REMEDIES OF SELF-DECEIT.

Is there anything substantial in creation? Is there any one in the world who is real? Is there any spiritual life at all? These are questions which we ask in our almost blameless irritation, when the subject of religious delusions is fairly brought before us. Self is miserably petty, and we see it in all its undisguised pettiness when our minds are introverted upon it. It takes the freshness even out of worship. It throws a sickly glare over devout practices, which ought to lie in the quiet unobtrusive sunshine of disinterested love. It is not easy to keep the line always clearly drawn between habitual examination of conscience and the misery of self-contemplation. Yet without examination of conscience we are lost, while self-contemplation is an odious leprosy of the soul. Down in the caverns of self the air is close, and all things are damp, mouldy, and decaying. A soul turned inward upon itself is mostly mildewed. An ailing self is a nauseous thing, the more repulsive the nearer we come to it, the more offensive the more we handle it. Moreover, all things turn to delusion! Prayer, sacraments, mortifications, sallies of divine love, things in themselves fresh as the leaping cataracts in the cool wood or on the breezy cliff, all turn or may easily turn to something diseased and unplea-

sant when they are imbedded in our spiritual life. I do not wonder that intellectual men, men of robust character, men of successful activity, and men of energetic physical health, have such a mingled horror and contempt of what is called the spiritual life. Nevertheless everything is right in its own place. Patients are better in a hospital than on the top of Ben Nevis. Fresh air, bright summits, dashing waters, aromatic pines, dewy fern, and crisp heather belong to the next world of spirituality, not to this one. It is foolish to be impatient. If there is a self-hatred which is wise, there is also a self-hatred which is either stupidity or conceit. A man is a coxcomb who cannot be patient with himself. If he breaks away from the undignified bondage of a pious life, will he in reality escape from himself? Or if he keeps to outward devotion, and studiously refuses to cultivate an interior spirit because of its sickliness and liability to delusion, will not his little spites, his airs, his self-importances, his tiny prejudices, his threadbare peculiarities, his unimposing fretfulness, his girlish jealousy, his ungraceful aptness to take offence, his love of nice cookery, his anxiety about his health, his reference to his age and his past,—will not all these pusillanimities, which will be his masters then, be sicklier far than the meanness of a craven scruple, the jargon of pedantic prayer, and the stifling atmosphere of a self-introverted spirit, the boisterousness of an inelegant asceticism, or the censoriousness of a man who has mortified himself into bitterness, because his grace has not been potent enough to overcome the incapacity for sweetness which belongs to his natural character? We may depend upon it that all men, who have an instinctive aversion for the spiritual life, are doing more of the devil's work than they suppose. It is fortunate that they are mostly unsuccessful men.

Why have I said all this? Because we are now going to

study the remedies of self-deceit, and I am anxious to keep down your expectations. We shall find nothing so complete or so specific or so definite, as we should desire. Self-deceit is a bad business. I was once entrapped into printing that there was nothing in the spiritual life which was irreparable. Half a dozen times self-deceit has driven me to the very edge of changing my mind. But I believe I was right, and I still keep to it. We will settle therefore that self-deceit is certainly reparable. Now, as to the spiritual treatment for it, you may think of that, as indeed of the spiritual life altogether, as a necessary evil, if you choose. This puts it low enough, yet leaves it indispensable; and when a thing which regards our relation to God is indispensable, the sooner we set to work, and the more cheerfully we work, the better, even for our interested selves. In this temper then let us look at the remedies of self-deceit. If there is nothing to satisfy great expectations, there is a good deal to cheer. As we sink deeper still and deeper in the knowledge of our own falsehood, we come nearer and nearer to the grand truthfulness of God; and somehow self-abasement gives us heart. Strange it should be so; yet so it is.

Something then may be said, first of all of a general character, and then secondly with a more special application. We may say generally that the knowledge of our own self-deceit is the nearest approach to its cure; and this is my reason for having dwelt at such length upon it. What is so versatile and individual has to be met in such a variety of ways, that, when we once see our self-deceit, the occasion and the circumstances will suggest the weapons with which we had best fight it. It does not like to be known. It affects disguise. It flourishes in concealment. When it is seen, a sense of guilt makes it tremble. A distrust in the completeness of its disguise unmans it, and

causes it to betray itself. It loses its head when a strong light is turned upon it, and makes an involuntary gesture, against which at other times it is on its guard. Thus the mere knowledge of our self-deceit not only enables us to direct our aim at it, but also renders it a much less formidable enemy by making it a coward. In so important a matter, this would be a sufficient excuse for having said so much of this evil, without pointing out a definite plan of cure. For, what has been already said enables us the more easily to recognise this self-deceit when we see it, and also indicates to us the localities in which it is most likely to be found. So that if the mere knowledge cannot be a complete cure, it is at least a partial one.

Then, again, general simplicity of life is an antagonistic power to self-deceit. Every additional degree of simplicity, which there is in our conduct, weakens the influence of self-deceit, diminishes its force, and subtracts its occasions. Simplicity is in the spiritual world what light is in the natural world. We cannot have a better idea of it than that which light gives us. The energy of light is such that scarcely anything can be exposed to it, for a few moments even, without some change taking place in it. Both animal life and vegetable life languish, if they are deprived of light. It gives the green to the leaves and the colours to the blossoms. The want of light will ever turn the course of nature, or rather will frustrate its designs. Some animals cannot develop in the dark. A tadpole becomes a gigantic tadpole if it is kept in the dark, but it cannot take the step of becoming a frog. Some people say diamonds are made by light. Many salts will not crystallize in the dark. We might multiply these things indefinitely; and yet we should find them all types and allegories of the action of heavenly simplicity in the spiritual life. A man who habitually thinks of God, or one who thinks of God first and himself

second, or one who does not sensibly live and act under the eyes and tongues of others, or one who does his duty lovingly, making few returns upon self, is as nearly an impossible subject for the greater triumphs of self-deceit as can be found among us poor self-loving, self-seeking creatures. With such souls self-deceit is almost mitigated into some other disease, when it does come, like the small-pox in vaccinated subjects. There are certainly endless reasons for being simple, and many of them extremely cogent; but there are few more cogent, than the reflection that all simplicity is a general unfitness for self-deceit. Its constitution has something in it peculiarly uncongenial to that disease.

One more general remark : general in two senses, both as regards the cure of the disease, and as regards its application to individual souls even as a general remark. When a man makes a series of discoveries, and such discoveries generally do come in a series, that he is the victim of continual self-deceit, and that what he valued as the principal basis of his inward life has been neither more nor less than a delusion, it will often be his wisest policy to remould his spiritual system, and cast it into some one concentrated practice; and the practice most suited to his case will be that of making acts of purity of intention, trying to render his pious intention actual, instead of virtual or habitual. The bird that lives on the leaves and berries of the huaco tree, and then fights with serpents, and is stung by them, and suffers not, because its ordinary nutriment is an antidote, presents us with an emblem of the soul that lives on purity of intention. Serpent-fighting is the work of all souls. Few, however, have the safe agility and speedy aim of the secretary-bird, to fly up to heaven with their snakes, and let them fall from the height to earth, and so be dashed to pieces, without either giving the reptiles the opportunity

of a bite, or allowing them to hamper its wings with their writhing folds. We must be content for the most part to eat the antidote, and then let ourselves be stung. But this remedy, of concentrating the whole power of the soul on purity of intention exclusively, cannot be indiscriminately recommended to all. It will do more harm than good to those who are scrupulous: and if few are scrupulous naturally, many are made so by the indiscretions of direction; so that, by fault or by misfortune, no slight proportion of pious persons are partially scrupulous. But those, with whom the remedy agrees, will find it almost a specific. Those, whom it makes unhappy, it does not suit. There is no serving God in unhappiness, when the unhappiness is of our own making. Let us serve God in the sunshine, while He makes the sun shine. We shall then serve Him all the better in the dark, when He sends the darkness. It is sure to come. But meanwhile false darkness is worse than false light. It is more deceiving, peopled with phantoms, rife with delusions. So, if seeking to make our intentions for God's glory always actual entangles our conduct instead of simplifying it, if it darkens our spirit instead of illuminating it, we may be sure it is not the right road for us, though it is right in itself, and right for so many others. Safe things are dangerous to those for whom they are not intended. Only let our light be God's light, and our darkness God's darkness, and we shall be safe at home when the great nightfall comes.

But let us come more to particulars. Before we speak of the remedies, we have something to say of the right way to go to work in effecting the cure of this disease. We must also fix what we are to avoid doing, as well as what we are to do. First of all then, we must not seek to combat self-deceit by means of an excessive examination of



conscience and a perpetual uneasy probing of our motives in all our actions. To keep undoing a wound, to see if it is healing, is an obvious folly. All things in the spiritual life should be taken quietly. Even our falls must be taken quietly. Much more than our spiritual exercises. But among these spiritual exercises it is to be expected, that some from their own nature should especially require tranquillity ; and examination of conscience is one of these. An excess of it draws our attention too much to ourselves, and disturbs the balance between the outward and the inward, upon the evenness of which all sobriety in asceticism depends. It also inclines us to scruples by exaggeration, and to unscrupulousness by partiality and extenuation. Our motives are complicated things, and the observation of them must be practised with caution, just as there are some chemical experiments which have to be made in a dangerous atmosphere, and therefore when once begun, will not brook delay. A diver can only remain a very limited time in the depths of the sea, and even then he often comes up with the blood gushing from his mouth and ears. So is it with us down in the depths of our own motives. We must not stay there long. If we cannot find what we want there quickly, it is better to come up quickly without having found it. We can often effect more by looking up to heaven than by going down under water. An earnest man is under a great temptation to rummage himself thoroughly, when something has gone wrong, especially when he has detected himself in a spiritual dishonesty. But it *is* a temptation, not an impulse of grace. It is often only a satisfaction to that sort of savage indignation which such men have against themselves, and which is itself merely another form of self-deceit, a form too which is a particular favourite with self-love.

We must also remember that this cure of self-deceit is

not a thing which can be done once for all, and then be over. It is a lifelong work. It is important to remember this, because we naturally go to work differently upon what is occasional and temporary, and upon what is a normal part of our daily lives. It is also a process to the success of which discouragement is peculiarly fatal. The longer an effort has to last, the less will it bear discouragement. What is persevering requires the vehemence of an impulse. A long length of wire droops and is slack, as you may see daily by the sides of the railways. So it is with perseverance. It must rest on posts. We cannot hang weights to it; its own weight is as much as it can carry. It will deserve praise if it carries that well. But, besides this, the nature of our warfare with self-deceit, and the character of the enemy we are fighting, both invest discouragement with a particular danger. It is hope which keeps faith's eye clear and steady. Now the tactics of self-deceit are to harass our hope. Entanglement, complication, indistinctness, stratagem, multiplicity of attack, and an habitually versatile neglect of the expected laws of war, tend to wear out our hope; and if we once sit down and despair, the chances are very much against our ever being allowed to get up again.

Moreover we must not be proud. There are battles in which it is not very honourable to be victor, because we are lowered by having to fight them at all, as when soldiers charge a mob in the streets. There are battles also in which the conquerors come out draggled and disfigured, as when men fight their way through a marsh. So in our warfare with self-deceit we must not look for glory. We shall never march into any of the moral cities we may conquer, with the sun shining on our clean scarlet and glittering gold, and on our unsoiled banner flapping like slow flashes of lightning in the bright beams, with our trumpets braying

wildly in the hoarse accents of triumph. We shall always go home draggled. We must also, for this is another characteristic of our warfare, show extreme patience and good-humoured contentment, with little victories and modest successes. We must often think a drawn battle as good as a victory. Finally, we must go to war with a manly resolution to spare ourselves in nothing, whatever turns up.

When we come to speak of the remedies themselves, we shall be disappointed to find, that even those which are most particular are after all very general. It must be so in a work which is so manifold, and which is also lifelong. The first remedy is a great distrust of self, not merely in a general way, although that cannot be urged too forcibly, for it is difficult to exaggerate its importance, but also and further in a very particular way. I must explain it by a homely illustration. When I was a little boy, I was greatly given to write verses. This interested those who loved me, and they showed at once their interest and their love by laying down this rule for me, that whenever any verse pleased me exceedingly, and appeared to me much better than the rest, I was to run my pen through it, and concoct something less striking. It was a sharp discipline, but tolerably efficacious. Now there are always certain things, or certain things at certain times, in which we feel quite sure we are right. It is plain as the sun at noon. Almost universally as we ought to distrust ourselves, these occasions and these subject matters are obviously dispensed from this universal wearisome vigilance. We have at least no reason to distrust ourselves here. Every man has, or, what is practically the same thing, believes he has, within his mind some one noontide region where it is always light, and light without even vicissitudes of brightness ; and up and down this he has the comfort of walking fearlessly, because there is no ambush there for self-deceit. But the remedy of self-distrust, now

in question, is the distrusting of ourselves precisely at these privileged times and places. It consists in making it of faith to ourselves, that, when we are most sure we are in the right, we are most surely in the wrong. Experience soon shows us, that in all such inward convictions of our being in the right there is a garrison of self-love. Meanwhile the practice of especially distrusting ourselves in these inward assurances very soon produces a peculiar effect upon our characters, and one which is of no little consequence in our conflict with self-deceit. A certain limpidity of character is perceived. There is no other word for it. We speak of limpid waters, such waters as come from mountain springs. It means something more than clear. It implies purity as well as transparence. It is not simplicity, though akin to it. It looks more like an acquisition than simplicity, more as if it had gone through a process, just as the bright water has percolated through the earth; and yet this limpid character moves as freely and flows as naturally as true simplicity. There is a peculiar clearness about characters which have learned to be true after having been deceitful.

Whatever prevents our following the counsels of self-love is also a remedy against self-deceit; and among these things we must enumerate docility to our spiritual director. This saves us from many a mistake. It likewise enables us to preserve our inward peace, and thus to act with much more quietness than we otherwise should have done; and quietness is always an unfavourable circumstance for self-deceit. Slow action is often a favourite field for self-deceit, almost more so than very rapid action, because it simulates discretion, and ministers to our obstinacy. Self-opinionatedness is said to be the energy of dulness. A stupid man is almost inevitably self-opinionated. But quietness of action, while it saves us from the speed which binds us, preserves us also from the yet more dangerous slowness of self-importance.

Of course it is easy for us to make a farce of direction, by insisting on having too much of it, and making it a safety-valve for our love of talking of ourselves, an opportunity for satisfying our appetite for sympathy, and an occasion of gossip, which is worse than frivolous, because it concerns our souls. But, sensibly and moderately practised, openness and docility to our director will greatly aid us in acquiring that tranquil spirit which is so congenial to simplicity.

Meditation on the attributes of God is another defence against self-deceit. The likeness of God is the aim of holiness, and we unconsciously imitate that which is a frequent subject of our meditation. But there is something more than this. The Creator's image is on the creature's soul. It has to be revived and refreshed rather than engraven anew ; and when we reverently put God before ourselves in detail and for a long time together, there is a sympathy in our soul which draws out, clears, defines, and sharpens His image within us. Then, moreover, God is truth. All His perfections have the character of truth upon them and the atmosphere of truth around them. The neighbourhood of God is the native land of truth. Moreover everything, which leads us to throw ourselves out of ourselves, and upon the objects of faith, is in itself a remedy against self-deceit ; and what can win us from self-contemplation more effectually, than that earthly beatific vision, the prospect of the attributes of God ? Reverence too is unfavourable to self-deceit, and meditation on the Divine Perfections is a perennial source of holy fear and self-abasing adoration. It is to be remarked also, and a curious remark it is, that reverence towards God makes men natural and simple towards each other. There is a modest yet unabashed naturalness of manner, which occasionally distinguishes spiritual persons, into whatever company they are thrown. At first we hardly notice it, as it is the gift of naturalness not to be noticed.

Then it strikes us, then grows upon us, and ends by exercising a sort of fascination over us. We shall generally find that the devotion of such men is marked by a forcible attraction towards the Attributes of God. A man will hardly ever be awkward in public, who in secret habitually pays reverent court to God. Habitual reverence is the high breeding of the spiritual life.

The choice of our devotions may also be turned into a remedy for self-deceit. Two may be particularly selected as more or less specific against self-deceit, as they are representations of the Eye of God. It is not easy to look God in the face, and then tell ourselves a lie. The planets were imaged in the water an hour ago, but the round moon has climbed heaven, and has effaced their tremulous reflections. So with us the eye of God eclipses the world's eye. If we become deceivers, and surely this is the ordinary process, by acting always under a consciousness that men's eyes are upon us, whatever distracts us from that baneful consciousness frees us from a slavery, which, like all slaveries, makes liars of us. The Eye of God alone can do this. What is it which makes political parties so essentially dishonest, even when composed of honest units, but the continual sense of being watched, the unintermitted feeling of critical and unkindly eyes being fixed on every move? Yet on a smaller scale the life of most of us is spent under a like bondage. The emancipation from this tyranny of human respect is one of the most beautiful operations of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It is not an emblem, or an idea, or a moving ritual, or a stirring relic, which is before us, but Jesus Himself, our actual Lord, in all the awful reality of that most peculiar eucharistic life. The more we are with the Blessed Sacrament the less we shall deceive ourselves. Who has not seen how that particular devotion changes souls, how it achieves conversions, how it perfects imperfect conversions,



how it lifts men's graces into a higher sphere, how it fills out vacant places in faulty characters, and gives symmetry and correctness to impulse and injudicious devotion? What is all this but saying that it is just the devotion to preserve us from self-deceit? But we cannot be always with the Blessed Sacrament; and the thought of it is quite a different thing from its presence. We must carry with us another devotion into the thick of life, devotion to our Guardian Angel. He is an eye of God, while his eye sees the unveiled God close to us, still when we are still, and moving as we move. He is nearer to us than any of our human critics. His criticisms are faultlessly just, and their justice is equalled by their kindness. When saints come habitually to see with their bodily eyes their Guardian Angel, it appears to me almost a natural consequence of their sanctity, developing in them by degrees the power of beholding God, just as the command over the elements and animals, which saints have, especially saints of remarkable austerity, seems to be the almost natural working of penance back to the state of man's unfallen innocence. The sight of their Guardian Angel is a growth of their holiness, and an emblem of what is inward, even while it is also a peculiar and gratuitous gift of God. Human respect soon begins to relax its hold upon us, when we come to love our Guardian Angel with so much respectful tenderness that we feel his presence almost without effort.

But we must not conclude without some cautions respecting our combat with self-deceit. We may do wrongly that which it is right to do. We may make false steps upon the true path. Particular examination of conscience, that which is technically called particular, is the hound with which we hunt self-deceit through its various lurking covers. Nevertheless we must not let the changeableness of our self-deceit carry us too far. In other words, we must be

careful not to change the subject of our particular examen too often. An inapt huntsman both wearies his dogs and puzzles them. He overhunts them. So we shall soon destroy both the speed, the scent, and the sagacity of our conscience, if we are continually directing it upon different subjects. We must also be very reserved in talking about our religious feelings. The more we detect ourselves in self-deceit, the more silent must we become about our own spiritual state. Religious talk is a very feast to self-deceit. We must also endeavour to walk purely by faith. Everything about our devotion should be as inward as is discreetly possible. We must not go by what chance advisers tell us, or by what some saintly religious is reported to have said of us, or by what some supernatural nun is considered to have hinted about our guidance. We must not let the habit of looking for outward providential tokens master us overmuch. The light, the road, the circumstances, the temper, of faith, —here is our safety; and, what is more, here also is our perfection. We must remember too that censoriousness, bad enough always and anywhere, has a peculiarly injurious effect upon the soul, when it is in actual conflict with self-deceit. Indeed, as a rule, all excess in talking, even when it is not about our own spiritual life or the characters of others, may be regarded as a power of self-deceit. The tongue has nearly as much to do with lies of thought as with lies of speech.

But above all things let us beware of one grand error. It is that of thinking, from the delusions and entanglements of the spiritual life, that God is as it were insidious, that He beguiles us into committing ourselves, and then stands by His bargain regardless of our infirmity. There is often an appearance of this in some of the complicated situations in which an almost inevitable self-deceit has placed us. Sometimes there comes a complication in the spiritual life,

which looks like the end of the world, so hopeless is it. It may even affect our outward life, if we are placed in charges of great responsibility. It looks like the end of the world; or is it a possibility of madness? Self-deceit is in some way or other concerned with it, we may be sure. We must therefore cultivate confidence in God as a most special remedy. We must cultivate it as a habit of mind, as well as an emotion of the heart. God never wishes to entrap us, or take us at a disadvantage. Yet, in fighting against self-deceit, it is perhaps the most distressing of our temptations to think thus unworthily of the straightforwardness of God's paternal love.

*SELF-DECEIT.*

## VI.

## THE PLACE AND HOUR WHEN WE BECOME TRUE.

SHALL we ever be real? Shall we ever put off this teasing, clinging falsehood, which adheres to all we do, and say, and suffer, and are? Our souls manage to disentangle themselves out of our bodies; but it is a sharp process. Perhaps the process of extricating ourselves out of the meshes of self-deceit will not only be like that other process, but may be nothing less than a part of it. If we look at what is practically success, then self-deceit may be regarded as curable. If we look at absolute success, there is no cure for it short of death, which is obviously an extinction rather than a cure. The knowledge that self-deceit is never completely overcome only makes us pine the more for heaven, and for the far-off springs of everlasting truthfulness. Earth cannot do all the work. Something must still be done beyond the grave, or in the act of descending into it.

But is it so? Will nothing make us real? Think of sorrow, and of how many cloaks it strips the soul. True. Sorrow is one of God's most able-bodied labourers. It does great things, and works thoroughly what it has to work. But it cannot cope with self-deceit. It is not its line. On the contrary, it only increases our power of deceiving our-

selves. There is a vast deal of unreality in most sorrow. It muffles our conscience. One moment, it puts our soul into studied positions, and the next moment it throws it into confusion. It holds a mirror to us, in which we see ourselves caricatured. The image is often exaggerated, always distorted. Consolation degenerates rapidly into flattery. Bodily comforts creep in, and no one turns them from the door. Prayer tends to be peevish. The atmosphere of the house is the spirit of dispensations. The temperature in which mourners dwell, except the mourners among the poor, is always relaxing. Hence it is, that in sorrow we so commonly lose sight of God, and so unsuspectingly magnify ourselves. Too many of us have to look back on seasons of grief rather as breaks and interruptions in our spiritual life, than periods of luxuriant and at the same time hardy growth. Even when sorrow sanctifies, it does not deliver us from self-deceit. It has no gift that way. Glorious sorrow! alas! we treat it very ill. For not unfrequently, so far from its making us more true, it seems like a joint conspiracy of God and self and our friends to deceive us the more completely. Yet this is not sorrow's fault, but ours.

Will joy then make us true? No! Perhaps it may deceive us less than sorrow; but it deceives us grievously. There are certainly some natures which expand in the sunshine, some characters which undo their folds and uncrease themselves in the presence of strong heat and bright light. With such persons joy seems to unlock the heart like wine, and a heart that has been once opened is not soon closed again. Joy has even sanctified some souls altogether. But this is not the common lot, nor would it have that effect on the multitude of men. Joy suits admirably those whom it suits at all; but sorrow suits the greater number. We are all of us no doubt indebted to joy for many bright thoughts

of God; and certainly he, whose thoughts about God are the brightest, will suffer least from self-deceit in the long run, though he will have varieties of self-deceit peculiar to himself. Let us grant, then, that with some men, and those more numerous perhaps than is generally supposed, joy does more than sorrow. Hortatory books will not concede this to us; but of course it is their profession to be dismal, and we will assume it in spite of them. Nevertheless the delivery from self-deceit is not among the gifts of joy. Even when it seems to help us to serve God better, and not only seems but actually does so, it hides from ourselves our own poverty of pure disinterested love. It is hard to believe that spiritual sweetness, if not all our own, is not in part our own. It is hard to believe that our heart, which feels so hot amid those heavenly ardours, is in reality hardly warmed through, and that, if God withdraws His gift, we can be wellnigh as mean and selfish and cowardly as we were before. We soon begin to think that we love God disinterestedly, and serve Him for His own blessed sake, and that the fear of hell or the hope of heaven are motives to which we need not now have recourse. But the repeated disenchantment of that idea is one of the most familiar discomforts of the spiritual life. When the joy goes, the disinterestedness goes also. The languor of our reaction is often also the fault of joy, because it has all along been deceiving us as to the real amount of solid love of God which there is in us, and so the spirit of elation has stolen upon us, and men after spiritual elation are as broken and haggard, as opium-eaters when the effect of the drug has passed away. Self-love everywhere! I am angry with myself for seeing it in so many places where it should not be: I could wish to think it was an hallucination peculiar to myself. Look at that beautiful sight, that exquisite piece of spiritual statuary. It is the joy of a devout soul,



running over with sunshine, its very look giving out a sort of silent inward music, pouring itself forth in almost passionate gratitude before God. The soul, the Guardian Angel, the emblems of spiritual graces, the Throne in front of which the worship is, how wonderful a group! Yet my jaundiced eye persists in seeing there—self worshipping self, even while it worships God.

Will suffering deliver us from the thralldom of self-deceit? No! It would not be a universal remedy even if it did. For suffering is by no means so universal as men often take for granted it is. Suffering is a very dignified word. It imports a great deal more than the little pains of life, or the ordinary sorrows of humanity. In these smooth times a great proportion of men go to their graves, without having had what could rightly be called suffering. They have outlived those whom it was natural they should outlive. Death has, perhaps, not altogether kept his incursions within these bounds. They have had two or three serious illnesses in threescore years. There have been the failings of age, following upon a more or less arduous application to their professions. But on the whole their heritage has been tranquillity. They have had a modicum of pain, an allowance of annoyances, a sprinkling of dissatisfactions and disappointments. But this does not amount to suffering. The fact is that those who have hearts noble enough to suffer are a minority of mankind. Most men are too selfish, or too elastic, or too easy-going, or too concentrated, to suffer from any event in life, short of those thunderbolts, which only fall now and then in the experience of a neighbourhood. Moralists overshoot the mark when they exaggerate the misery of the world. Men of the world feel the unreality of this prosing, and laugh at it, and despise religion, to whose account they put it.

Indeed all this wailing about the wretchedness of the

world is but the threadbare pathos of an old-fashioned pastoral. It is worn out. No one is moved by it, unless indeed it makes men bad by irritating their common sense against religion, which has no ally one half so valuable as common sense. The fact is, the world is a very bright world, and, all things considered, an extremely satisfactory world, so far as comfort is concerned. The wonder is, nay the misery is, that it can be so comfortable when it is so sinful. However, the practical fact is that in these days nobody believes the other view. They taste the world, and smack their lips; for it is very sweet. If the world was so obviously miserable, moralists would be spared the trouble of their exhortations. Men are not so bent on being miserable, that they need to be threatened with hellfire for wilfully expatiating in dismal and repulsive wretchedness. Why warn us so vehemently against the unhappiness of the world, when that very unhappiness will keep us from it more effectually than all these admonitions? In truth, the moralists themselves do not believe their own teaching. Look at them. They utter their lamentations, and enjoy themselves. It is the ascetics who are right, and not the moralists. For the ascetics admit the charms of the world, and are timid and nervous about them. They say of the wickedness of the world, what moralists say of its wretchedness. They are dismayed by its attractiveness. This is the true view, and even the man of the world admits the truth of it in his heart. Some day that heart may be softened by a sense of the world's wickedness, while it is only hardened now by the preaching of the world's wretchedness.

Thus, even if suffering were a deliverance from self-deceit, it would be a much less universal remedy than we need. But in truth, though suffering is an angel from God, and does the work of justice in such a manner as to make it more like a work of love, our own vileness is so great that

the results of suffering upon us are more frequently humiliating than otherwise. It is often too strong a medicine for our weakness; and this may be the reason why the compassion of our Heavenly Father in so many cases withholds it. When He punishes, He punishes far below our power of endurance; and when He comes to heal our souls, He spares us even in the bitterness of His remedies. Have you ever suffered yourself? Then did you not find how suffering concentrated you upon yourself? It was so hard to be unselfish, so hard to think for others, so almost impossible to legislate for them. There was in you a backwardness to make sacrifices to others, which would have been incredible to you before the suffering came. You never dreamed you were so completely your own centre as the suffering proves you to have been. Even God is to revolve round you. You look at Him as a power that can lighten your load, or as a fountain of consolation, or as a source of miraculous strength, or as one to whom you may lawfully complain. But in your own mind God has reference to you, not you to God. Was it not so? But is not this going deeper into the thickets of self-deceit instead of getting out upon the open plain?

Moreover, when interior vigilance is suspended, self-deceit is left unresisted. At best we are resting on our arms, while self-deceit never rests at all. It is a great thing for a general to be able to do with little sleep, and the devil finds his account in his characteristic wakefulness. Yet I hardly know a rarer grace than inward vigilance in suffering. Suffering wearies us. We cannot keep up so many combats on all sides so unintermittingly. Like a burn, suffering calls our vital heat to itself, to the spot injured. Our other limbs grow cold. Our heart is dangerously drained. Meanwhile there is no such generosity among our spiritual foes as that they should grant us a truce, and not harass us in

front while suffering is charging us in the rear. But, by wearying us, suffering also blinds us. If we do not perceive this in ourselves, we do not fail to notice it in others. Nothing strikes us so much in our intercourse with suffering persons, and in our most intimate ministries to them, as their blindness. We do not know which to admire most, the amount of their delusion, or its unsuspecting tranquillity. A time of suffering is for the most part a time of unreality. Suffering therefore will not extricate us from that which its tendency is rather to increase.

Will death deliver us from self-deceit? It will come nearest of all things to doing so. Being dead will deliver us, but not the act of dying? But can we be unreal when we are dying? The experience of deathbeds is at hand with a melancholy affirmative. How far it is conscious unreality or unconscious, how far, that is to say, it is a moral act, is another question. But there is no doubt, that even good persons can be somewhat dramatic in death. The dying bed can be the boards of a playhouse. We can act even then and there. The desire to please which is so deep in our nature appears even then, and animates the desire to give edification. The old Roman is not the only one who has gathered his toga round him to die gracefully, though it was but a heathenish grace to seek. Indeed perfect simplicity is not common on a deathbed, unless it be a rapid ending. Grace seems to wear out, and ignoble self shows through. But not unfrequently there is much more acting than this implies. Perhaps it may in some degree be referable to a sort of habit of playing at dying, which is occasionally recommended in pious books, and which pleases certain minds. When a man has been inventing last words for years, rehearsing the manner of receiving the last sacraments, and making pictures for himself of a modestly triumphant end, it is difficult to suppose that all this imaginary

scene-making will not appear to a certain extent, even in the presence of the grim realities. On the whole it comes to this. If in life we have already tried to be real, death will show us how little we have done. If we have not made that trial in life, we shall only be startled by waking up to die, and then die before the amazement is past and we can collect ourselves. Alas! few men die more than half awake.

What then will make us real? The Face of God will do it. The first kingly touch of eternity will not only wake us, but it will heal us also. Self-deceit is the king's evil of the soul, and the Sovereign's hand alone can cure it. The self-knowledge flashed upon us by the glance of Jesus at the judgment will in one moment unclothe the soul of all untruthfulness, and clothe it in its vesture of immortal truth. The utter self-abasement caused in us by the ravishing beauty of the Godhead will be the ultimate truth of our created natures.

Clearly, then, the nearest approach to this which is possible on earth will be our best defence against self-deceit; and the nearest approach to it is the serving God out of personal love. Love, not all love, but divine love, has a speciality to make us real. Communion with God eats away our unreality, something after the fashion of a sacrament. We catch simplicity as part of the likeness of Jesus; and it is His likeness which love fastens on. When we look out of ourselves in loving faith, our inward processes are fewer in number, and amazingly simplified. But their majesty is only enhanced by their simplicity. When our interior life is reduced to a single operation of grace, it is then that we are safest. When many things are going on in us at once, there is little growth, and much self-deceiving. We must look out to God, pass over to Him, lean upon Him, learn to be one with Him, and let love of

Him burn love of self away, so that our union may be effected. Out of God all is unreal. Away from God all is untrue. Untruthfulness is the condition of the creature. How painfully we feel, when we are at our best estate, and even better people than ourselves when they are at their best estate, that we are helplessly pretentious, indeliberate unrealities, unintentional hypocrisies! It is a sober cheer, that the time will come to all of us, when we shall play parts no more, neither with others, nor with ourselves, nor yet with God.



## *WHY SO LITTLE COMES OF FREQUENT CONFESSION.*

WE go to confession every week, and we are what we are. If we think soberly of this fact, it is about as great a mystery as any which either nature or grace can show us. Confession is a stupendous work in which God and man combine to do great things. We take pains with our confessions. We use at least ordinary diligence with our examinations of conscience. We pay particular attention to our dispositions. We receive absolution. This happens weekly, and we remain what we are. If anything is worth enquiring into, this is. Instead of going through the mystery, in order to arrive at its explanation, I will give the explanation first, and consider the mystery afterwards. For the explanation is practically of much greater importance to us than the mystery itself. One is a mere fact; the other is a lesson. If we are really in earnest about our souls, there is no lesson we have more need to lay to heart than the one which explains the little fruit which comes of frequent sacraments. The lesson is, that holiness depends less upon what we do, than upon how we do it.

This axiom, then, is to be our text: Holiness depends less upon what we do, than upon how we do it. It sounds commonplace enough; but it has sufficient matter in it for the study of a life, and for the practice of eternity. In spiritual things the goodness of the matter is of more conse-

quence than its novelty. So do not let us scout this trite remark. In devotion it is better to be safe than to be original.

Reading the life of a saint is a very edifying thing. But, when we have read many hundreds of saints' lives, we begin to see a great deal which we never saw before. We learn a wisdom from them, which no single life of a saint can give. The peculiarities of saints drop out of sight. We see them as a whole, as a class, as a species. We perceive what is common to them all, and what is the foundation of sanctity in them all. This is of far more importance to us than their individual examples. It also leads us much deeper. It is getting another sight of God from a fresh point of view. It is a kind of bible, written historically like the old testament. It is a Summa of theology. What I want to do now, is to call attention to one only of the very many spiritual characteristics of the saints, looked at as a body. Of course there are exceptions, exceptions which will rise to everybody's thoughts. But they are really so few, that they barely suffice to prove the rule. The characteristic is, that on the whole the saints did few things. Be sure of the truth of this before you grant it; for you will find that a great many things follow from it. What I assert then is, that the saints, as a class, did few things. Their lives were by no means crammed with works, even with works of mercy. They made a point of keeping considerable reserves of time for themselves, and for the affairs of their own souls. Their activity was far more contemplative than we in these days are inclined to suspect. They were men who were not over-ridden by publicity. They were men whose devotional practices were few in number, and remarkably simple in method. On the whole their lives seem very empty of facts, disappointingly empty. I am almost afraid to pass on to anything else, lest you should not have time to master

this statement as I should wish. It will take us years to realise the importance of it.

The lives of the saints often innocently deceive us in this respect; especially those lives which are modelled on the Processes of Canonization. A chapter on a saint's heroic charity will perhaps overwhelm us by its crowded facts, multiplied occupations, incessant movement, almost incompatible offices, superhuman activities, and the like. We forget it represents fifty or sixty years, of twelve months each. But if we turn to the chapter on the saint's gift of prayer, we find he spent four or five hours a day in prayer, or seven as Suarez did, or ten as St. Francis Borgia did. Then we see that, even without giving the saint any time to eat or sleep, his prayer left him no time in the day for as much activity as modern life demands of most of us. Check the chapter on charity by the chapter on prayer, and you will get some notable results about the saints.

But I proceed. Many saints have been made saints by one thing.\* The sanctity of many has been consummated in its very beginning. To these, conversion has been the same thing as perseverance. St. Antony of the Desert and St. Francis of Assisi are examples of this class of saints. Hence it was that the great feature of their holiness was its extreme simplicity. St. Francis' manner of prayer by repetitions may be quoted as an instance of this characteristic simplicity. Think, again, of what St. Alphonso and others say of a single Communion, that it is enough of itself to make a saint, or what the Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice says of gaining Indulgences, that that one practice is a certain road to sanctity. We are too much given to swallowing our graces without chewing them. We do not

\* Bellecio enumerates among these, SS. Martin, John the Calybite, Gualbert, Francis Borgia, and Francis Xavier. *Solide Vertu*, part iii. chap ii. art. iii. sect. 2.

extract from them one half the sweetness, one half the nourishment, one half the medicinal virtue, which God has deposited in them. We are too quick with them, too impetuous in the use of them. We do not develop them. I believe the clear knowledge of what grace is, its nature, its habits, and its possibilities, would destroy half the lukewarmness in the world ; for I suspect full half of it comes from impetuosity and precipitation, from human activity, and a want of slowness before God.

The saints, as a body, do few things. Some saints have been made saints by one thing. One Communion is enough to make a saint. These are specimens of the hidden wisdom of the saints. What it comes to is, that the only important thing in good works is the amount of love which we put into them. The soul of an action is its motive. The power of an action is neither in its size nor in its duration, though both these are very considerable matters. But its power is in its intention. An intention is pure in proportion as it is loving. Thus, you see, what we want is not many actions, but a great momentum in a few actions. If we could give an equally great momentum to a great number of actions, so much the better. But the fact is that we cannot. Actions trip each other up when they are crowded. No one has the use of his arms in a crowd, and very little use of his legs. His voice is all that is free, and that is not very audible ; and in heavenly things the voice is a most singularly unhelpful part of us. Devotions even prey upon each other, eat each other up, and then lie dormant because they are gorged. In good deeds we cannot unite number and momentum. We must choose between the two ; and there can be no hesitation in our choice. One stone that we can throw into heaven is worth a thousand that fall short of it, and tumble into homeless space. In truth we have thrown stones enough into space already. It is sad to

think of where they may have got to by this time. Old-fashioned people talk in an uncomfortable way of a certain pavement of hell. There is no doubt then that the principle of number must go to the wall. We make our election of momentum. Momentum is purity of intention. Purity of intention is love.

We must not fall into a mistake here. It is true that, as a general rule, great love gives a facility in doing hard things. But I am not speaking of an heroic love. I am speaking of such a love as you and I may soberly persist in exacting from ourselves, considering all the grace we receive. Love, which is sufficient to give momentum enough to an action to carry it to heaven, may not be sufficient to make a hard thing easy to do, neither need it be accompanied by any sensible sweetness. Indeed in most cases it is not. Nay, I will go further. It is not by any means clear that heroic love devours all the repugnances of nature with sufficient rapidity to give even saints an habitual facility of action in hard things, any more than it always makes the flames of the martyrs cool and refreshing, and the teeth of the wild beasts as gentle as embraces, although it has done so to some. But it is perfectly clear that even heroic love is by no means universally accompanied by sensible sweetness in its exercise. It is often very heroic when it is driest, and most heroic when it is not so much as conscious of its own existence. Hence we must not distrust our actions or devotions, because they have not this sensible sweetness, neither must we make such sweetness the test of our purity of intention. It is no part of real momentum. We must be the more careful to bear this in mind, because, in mere natural activity, facility and sweetness are full half the momentum. If this were to be the case in religion, piety must begin in sentimentality, grow in excitement, and perfect itself in frenzy. There would be no help for it.

Christian enthusiasm is a very sober sort of determination. It does not consist in neglecting calculations, but in running immense risks in the face of very disheartening calculations. We agree, then, to throw sweetness overboard, wistfully indeed, but quite understanding what we are about.

Now this doctrine of intention gives a peculiar character to all our actions. We see that their value does not depend upon their size or age, altogether, or even chiefly. They have to do with God, to whom, because He is infinite, nothing is great and nothing small. Greatness and littleness are not His standards. Thus the capabilities of our humblest actions have something in them which approaches the inexhaustible. Or at least they are of such a nature that grace can use them almost inexhaustibly. Who, in the inner space of his own soul, has ever known what an unfolded grace is like? We have given our graces neither time nor room. Their capabilities are immense. This is one of the things which make holiness so difficult. We are always falling so far short of our grace. Take the saying of the Angelus three times a day. What is it but saying a short prayer when a bell rings? Yet years of saying it, with great love, with intense attention to God, with an interior spirit of jubilant thanksgiving for the Incarnation, would take us half way to heaven. Nay, one such saying of it, if we came to that, could merit heaven. This illustrates the inexhaustibleness of grace. Then is it not true that the saying of the Angelus is really a very considerable difficulty? When the bell startles us, how far we find ourselves to have been from God, by the very fact that we hardly get back to Him before the prayer is over! We are thrown into a bustle. We sometimes hardly know what we are saying. If some one interrupts us by coming into the room, we do not know where we left off. No devotion can be less satisfactory to us. Yet, when it is



over, how the study, or the conversation, pieces itself naturally and painlessly on to its antecedents, as if there had been no Angelus, while there was something positively painful in the effort we made to put ourselves together for the act of prayer. Perhaps the Angelus is often rather a fountain of venial sins, or slovenlinesses, than a prolific source of merit, as it ought to be. The good it has done us has often come rather from the external admonition which it is, than from its being an act of interior worship. It seems to me uncommonly difficult to attain to a satisfactory saying of the Angelus. It so soon degenerates into praying against a bell. The difficulty I find in saying the Angelus always shows me more than anything else the immeasurable distance between holy persons and myself. It illustrates to me the way in which a man must possess himself, and be recollected, and always ready to give the due momentum to his actions, and therefore how few they should be, in order that he may have time and room, not so much to do what he has to do, as to do it well.

It is only in exceptional cases that coolness and calmness are compatible with having much to do. Multitude is not simplicity. Things that are done for God should be done very cleanly. They must be shapely, as well as vigorous. What a beautiful thing, doubtless, was the Angelus of St. Francis of Sales! There was more in it than in a week of our devotional failures. When a man has to make a great effort, he must carefully put himself in a position to make it. The saints threw immense effort into their least actions. Immense efforts cannot help being limited in number. Hence the saints were men of few actions and of few devotions. Their power was love; their touchstone pure intention. They concentrated everything upon their intention. They made it do duty for everything else. It was their compendium of holiness. When we, who are not

saints, want to be better than we are, we add a new devotion, put on an additional mortification, undertake a fresh work of mercy, or give more liberal alms. All this is most excellent. But, as an animal betrays itself by its instincts, however long it may have been domesticated, so we, who may be always reading the lives of the saints, betray by all this that inadequate view of holiness which belongs to the imperfection of our love. Our first impulsive notion of greater sanctity is some form of addition. The only variety is in the choice of what we shall add. The saints live in a roomy day, a day of few actions; they lessen these few as their fervour increases, perhaps make them still fewer by way of advancing more rapidly, and then throw harder, that is, fling a more nervous energetic inward life into what they do. This appears to me the whole account of the saints. To begin, therefore, to follow the saints we must repudiate the addition theory.

Now that we have got together this little collection of facts and principles, our next step must be to apply them to the results of frequent confession. They may all be summed up in one sentence, The saints were men who did less than other people, but who did what they had to do a thousand times better.

What then is confession? It is one of our actions. Or rather it is a mixed act, partly by God and partly by man. It belongs therefore to the supernatural order. It is an action of immense significance, of superhuman power, and it may be of incalculable worth. The very fact of its combining in itself the agencies of the Creator and the creature is enough to show us of what value and consequence it is. If a few common actions done perfectly are enough to make saints of us, what may we not say of a few perfect confessions? Yet we go to confession weekly, and are what we are! Literature is a power on earth, and a power in the natural

order, whose importance it is not easy to exaggerate. Different nations have had their literatures. Each nation has had various schools of literature at different times. They have stood to the progress of civilisation in the double relation of cause and effect. They have stamped epochs. They have been dominant, or nearly dominant, over the manners and morals of their times. They have therefore indirectly decided the eternal destiny of multitudes of individual souls. Yet no one school of literature, nor all its schools put together, can compete with a single good confession in beauty or importance. Philosophies have risen and fallen on the earth, and have reigned successively, and have reigned energetically; and each system thought itself the perfection of the world and the solution of the grand difficulty. Yet the homeliness of one good confession is a better thing than the subtleties of the most profound intellectual system. No revolution, though it may uncrown a king, and emancipate a people, is of so much consequence as a good confession, though alas! it supplies multitudes of souls with superabundant matter for confession. No one must underrate the importance of scientific discoveries. Not only may the wider distribution of comfort and the elevation of the temporal wellbeing of the world depend upon them, but happiness and morals are often implicitly concerned in them. Yet no discovery that was ever made can compete in real intrinsic importance with a good confession. Nevertheless all this is a feeble and inadequate way of attaining a true notion of the grandeur of confession.

Confession is an act of faith on the part of the creature. It is also an act of the most concentrated worship. It is a breaking with the world and a turning to God. It is a triumph over millions of evil spirits of huge power and, comparatively with us men, of unbounded intellect. It is the beginning of an eternity of ineffable union with God;

and confers the right of beholding the invisible face to face. A man in a state of sin sees in a fellow-creature, as sinful as himself, perhaps even evidently more unworthy, the form and features and real jurisdiction of the Incarnate Son of God. He kneels at his feet as if he were divine. He narrates to him the most secret shames and hidden sins of his soul. He submits to his questioning, as if he were the absolute and ultimate Judge of all the earth. He listens with meekness to his reproof, as if it were God Himself who spoke. He leaves to him the fixing of his punishment. He gives him rights over the arrangement of much of his external life. He makes this narration of his sins with a profound sorrow, a sorrow which is based on no mere human disgrace, or forfeiture of worldly honour, or ruin of temporal interests. It is not even based only on the fear of divine punishments, without some admixture of divine love. He is sorry with a sorrow, to which neither all the power nor all the wisdom of the world can help him, but which is itself the supernatural gift of God. His sorrow involves a detestation of his past sin, which is another gift of God. It is accompanied also with a firm determination never to offend God again, a determination which chooses between the will of God and the liberty of sin, and elects God's will, whatever cost it may be found to involve. This energetic determination is the thing which he has taken most pains about. Neither has he come to it without study, effort, and diligence. Nevertheless it is God's gift rather than his own attainment. His act thus completed, with much help and interference on the part of God, God Himself begins His exclusive part. One of His creatures, a fallible as well as himself a guilty judge, pronounces some few words, and straightway though invisibly and spiritually, there falls from the veins of Jesus a shower of the Precious Blood, shed hundreds of years ago and resumed three days after it was

shed, and bedews the sinner's soul. All his guilt is done away instantaneously. His state is completely changed. Manifold works are done in his soul, such as the reinfusion of certain supernatural habits, the revival of dead merits, and a communication of the divine nature. His change can only be paralleled with that of a devil into an angel. All heaven is stirred at the event. It is the special subject of the angelic jubilee. No angel or saint could have done it, or even have applied it as instruments. It is the immediate action of the Creator on the soul of His creature. This is a modest description of a good confession, kept very much within bounds, and which might have been heightened by many other seemingly miraculous phenomena. In its measure and degree, without the reinfusion of habits, and sundry other changes, the same supernatural apparatus attends upon the confession of venial sins. God is not less active, nor grace less mysterious in the act. Yet this is the act, which we with God perform weekly, and are what we are !

Now from such an action as this, what results might we not expect ? We can only compare it to baptism or to martyrdom, one of which permanently changes our state, and impresses an abiding character upon our souls, and the other admits us to the immediate Vision of God. Indeed there are many analogies between these three actions. But let us moderate our expectations. We should at least expect great things to follow from a valid confession ; we should look for marked changes, and enduring results. In truth such results would seem unavoidable. The action involves so very much on our part, and holds in itself such a vast amount of divine agency, that, if it be valid at all, it must go forth on its way conquering and working miracles. Let us take any saint we please, and consider the build and fashion of his holiness. Let us measure the height of his prayers, the depth of his

humility, the breadth of his love, the length of his austerities. Surely less grace than goes to a valid confession might, were it handled judiciously, accomplish as much as this. If a valid confession can send a lifelong sinner and a public criminal from the scaffold to the bright inner heaven, surely also the making of a saint is within the compass of its capabilities. But now multiply these valid confessions, the valid confessions of us who are aiming at a devout life, and are taking very considerable pains about it. Multiply our years by fifty. Perhaps we have made between one and two thousand valid confessions. For each confession we have reverently prepared; for each we have examined our consciences, and excited our sorrow; for each we have taken peculiar pains and made hearty prayer for our firm purpose of amendment; each has been gloriously crowned by absolution. Now would it not be monstrous to say that these thousand or two thousand grace-miracles had made no visible change in us, had left us substantially what we were before, and had done nothing more than *possibly* prevent us from having become something worse? Would it not shake a man's faith to be told such a thing? If this were true, must not grace be altogether a romance, and the sacraments mere rubrics or postures? Neither can we fall back upon the supposition of the invalidity of all these confessions. For I am speaking only of careful confessions, of the confessions of people who are very much in earnest, who are not taking things easily, who do not indulge in liberties with God, and who are making a great point, and a distinct point, of sorrow for venial sins, while they are also solicitous to a scruple about their purpose of amendment. If such confessions are not valid, then none in the world are.

But let us come down from the heights of our imaginary expectations. What, as a matter of fact, are the actual results of a thousand good confessions? We have a tolerably



clear remembrance of what we were twenty years ago. Now as to the general improvement of our character, what have all these confessions done? Is there much palpable change? Is the change solid? Is its amount at all proportioned to the amount of supernatural agency, to the quantity of the Precious Blood, to the immediate operation of the Eternal Creator upon our souls? Again: what has been the result of all those confessions in the way of power over the venial sins and culpable unworthinesses, which we have been perpetually confessing? Are we more masters of ourselves than we were? Are we much more masters of ourselves? Is our growth in self-mastery at all adequate to the expenditure both of God and ourselves in a thousand confessions? Let us take our tongues. It is plain that a man, who makes his meditation in the morning, and does not govern his tongue during the day, is a religious sham. Surely a man, who confesses week after week to want of government of the tongue, and who governs it not a whit better in the succeeding weeks, ought not by common laws to be far off from being a hypocrite. Yet we should be afraid of laying down any such axiom, lest we should only be sanctioning a law, not merely against ourselves, but by which if men were judged, they might as well cease to hope. For what has our experience been, the experience of a thousand confessions, in this very particular? Again: what have our thousand confessions done for us in the way of increase of fervour? Is the retrospect from this point of view at all more satisfactory? I dare not go on, lest we should lose heart too much. The road to all amendment lies through some disheartenment. But this is so unusually disheartening. Then let us speak gently. The result of our thousand confessions has not been in all respects what we should have expected beforehand. Their influence has been hardly up to the mark. There has been disappointment in the matter, invariable even if not excessive.

But there is no kindness in landing us in a difficulty, unless we are also shown how to get out of it. What is the cause of the results of frequent confession falling so far below our most reasonable calculations, nay even below our lukewarm expectations? We are sincere. We are diligent. We have faith. We have carried our faith, our diligence, and our sincerity into our confessions. What then is lacking? What is the secret want? Purity of intention. A short answer, yet a very broad one. This is the whole account of the matter, the reading of the riddle, the light in the dark place. We have not looked simply, and only, and always, to God.

We shall prove this to ourselves by examining our own motives. Much practical good will also come of the examination by the way. We do not do justice to our own insincerity. We know we are not simple; but we hardly know how very far we are from simplicity. Let us look then at the different motives which prevail in our minds at different times, when we go to confession; and let us remember that it is not so much with these motives in themselves, but with these motives as dominant, that we are finding fault. Sometimes it is rather low spirits than sin, which send us to confession; and this also with a very considerable admixture of self-love. We want comfort and consolation, because we are downcast; and we know that both those spiritual luxuries are for the most part to be found in confession. We have begun of late to feel a little lonely. God has become a little short of being sufficient. Nobody has praised us for a long while. We want a little quiet spiritual flattery. We believe we can get this from our confessor. Either he is very kind, and indulgent, and prone to talk long, and given to consolation: or at least we can open our hearts to him in so piteous a way, making our confession a sort of elegy, with a dash of exag-

geration, that we are nearly sure, unless he is unusually preoccupied, to elicit from him the honey of which we stand in need. It will disagree with us to a certainty. Experience has taught us that. But it can be set right in another confession, a confession of a different species.

Sometimes we have a general feeling of being all wrong with God. It is not so much from having some definite fault upon our consciences, as from an equable and universal tepidity. It is like the feeling of an invalid before he is washed in the morning. It is a strange and peculiar discomfort. Confession is the bath of the hot dry skin and superficial fidgetiness of the soul. So we go to it to recover the sense of being right with God. We half know, that what is wanted is more prayer, more honesty in mortification, a little more decisive separation from the world, and, above all, an instantaneous putting into execution of good resolutions which have been hanging about us for weeks past only partially resolved. But all this involves a good deal; and really, we are spiritually so weak just now, that discretion suggests that we should take things easily. Confession at all events will give us for the time, what a little smart severity with ourselves would give us permanently. So we will go to confession first of all, and discuss the question of severity later on.

Some of us think a great deal of our director's judgment of us, and by watching him we manage to get a side-view of it, which is tolerably correct. Now this judgment of us we consider to be not quite the thing. If it does not need reversing, it calls for revision. We, honest souls! have no self-love in the matter. We do not want him to think better of us than we deserve. Indeed he had better think a little worse of us, because it would be rather sanctifying, and we look forward to being saints some time. But, as he has to direct us, it is really of importance to our best

interests that he should at least take an accurate view of us; and somehow if this view of us were a trifle more accurate, it would be considerably more favourable. But what shall we do? We cannot argue the matter with him. He would at once put that down to wounded feeling. He would not give us credit for the dispassionate state of mind in which we really are. We must use God's sacrament as a sort of stratagem. We must shape our confessions so as to insinuate into his mind the view we would have him take. We must adroitly anticipate his objections. We must involve his answer in our question. We must glide in a very general way over what is likely to strengthen his present prejudices. We can even accuse ourselves of something wrong in feelings which he would wish us to have, but which he thinks us without. All this must be done, and may be done, without any positive untruth; and it should be done with all the air of innocence and guilelessness. To be sure, it is sad having to make such a use of a very grave and reverend sacrament. To be diplomatic and contrite, both at once, is a little hard. Still the necessity is so urgent, the end in view so good, that we must tolerate with a graceful patience the discomfort of the means.

It may be that our time has come for going to confession, and therefore that we go, not driven by any interior necessity, by any desire to be more closely united to God, or to be more and more thoroughly washed from our iniquities. It is the day for confession, and therefore we go. We run a risk now of an invalid confession. However, we avoid that by taking the usual pains with our examination, our sorrow, and our purpose. Still it remains true that we go chiefly because it is our time to go. Let me make an observation here. It is hard to do well the things that we are doing constantly. Certainly. But experience shows us that these things do not tend with equal propension at all

times to become mere formalities. Like other temptations, the temptation to be formal has its seasons, its departures and its returns. So there are times, for which we can see no reason, only so it is, when the sacraments incline to become formalities. Now at these seasons we must not be content with our usual pains; we must take unusual pains, because the unusual pains are necessary then to get us up to the common point, to which at ordinary times the usual pains can take us. Thus a meditation of ten minutes before the Blessed Sacrament, on the sanctity of God, or on the necessities of our souls, if added to our usual diligence and preparation, would put the vigour we need into our confession of routine. But enough of this. Confessions of routine want a treatise to themselves.

Some of us get into a way of never looking at confession by itself. To us it is simply part of the preparation for communion. Of course we know that confession is a sacrament by itself; but we do not know it with an energetic practical knowledge. It is to us practically part of another ceremony. Few people do justice to the mischievous tendency of this mistake. It is fertile in evils to the soul. It even goes to the length of blunting our faith at last. It interferes with our perception of the necessity of grace. It diminishes our motives for loving Jesus, by confusing them. It takes off the edge from our hatred of sin. It operates unfavourably on our humility, by leading us to reflect too much on our privileges and too little on our responsibilities. It even lessens our appreciation of God's goodness, by leading us to dwell on it apart from the sense of our own wretchedness. We must look at confession not as a whole, but as a part. There is a propriety in confession going before communion. But confession is an awful sacrament in itself, with separate proprieties of its own, deeply to be revered, and almost

dreaded, because of the tingling realities of its contact with God.

Sometimes, and this is a common fault in converts, people go to confession only for the purpose of direction. They use a great sacrament merely as a handle or occasion for something else, for another purpose, a good purpose indeed, but a very inferior and subordinate one. Thus they put aside all thought of the absolution, or rather it does not come to them to think of it. They have probably not taken so much pains with their examination, their sorrow, and their purpose of amendment, as they should have done. They have not realised God's peculiar presence in the confessional, because they have not come to confession as a sacrament. Hence confession often disappoints them, and they lose their devotion to it as a sacrament. Their irreverence has been unconscious and unintentional ; but it has not been the less an irreverence ; and they suffer for it in their souls. They have come to talk, or they have come to listen. They have not come to confess. Thus they confess, not invalidly, but unworthily, not discerning the Precious Blood and its special sacramental dispensation there. Experience shows, that there are few things more difficult to implant in converts than a real faith in confession as a sacrament, and a grave humble advertence to the sacramental character of the action in which they are engaged. We must be at great pains in teaching them this, more especially if they have been in the habit of going to confession while they were outside the church, as it is precisely these persons who take the greatest liberties with the sacrament. This often interferes very seriously with their becoming fervent catholics. Plainly it is the old leaven still at work : self is the centre, and not God. Direction is more attractive to them than confession.

Sometimes we go to confession, because, having sinned



we fear the punishment of our sins. It is a most excellent reason for going to confession; nay, more than excellent, it is imperative. We want to shorten purgatory. We want to be in a condition for gaining plenary indulgences. Two most excellent wants, so excellent that a man has reason to suspect his whole piety to be a delusion, if he has them not. It is very hard also, while under the pressure of a sense of sin, not to let this motive be, not merely present, but dominant. Nevertheless we had better take some little pains to hinder its being so. Without losing hold of that motive, we can push a little deeper by prayer and effort, because prayer and effort will both bring the grace to do so. We can put ourselves in God's presence, and look at His side of the question. We can wish to have our souls cleansed for the sake of God's glory, as well as our own safety. At any rate the avoiding of hell and the shortening of purgatory must not have the action all to themselves. Some room must be left for higher things. There must be some loving devotion to the sanctity of God, in order to do well what we do validly.

These are specimens of the intentions with which we too often go to confession. Self-love, varying as it does in almost every soul, can vary them indefinitely. Each of us best knows his own dishonesties. The conclusion seems to be, that we do not habitually go to confession, looking simply, and steadfastly, and exclusively, to God. The consequence is, that very little, comparatively speaking, comes of our frequent confession, so little that we can bear its littleness no longer, and are determined there shall be a change. The advice then is, to do fewer things, and do them better, taking more pains with our purity of intention. Do we not often ask ourselves, why so few souls are perfect? Surely the answer is, That they are kept back by many things, but by few things so much as by the too great

number of their prayers and spiritual exercises. They do too much to do it well. Their life treads on its own heels all the day long. They are so pressed by all they have taken upon themselves, that they get into a hurry, and so raise a dust as they go, and this dust hinders them from seeing God.

## *WEARINESS IN WELLDOING.*

IN the world of the soul there are sometimes shadows, when there are no clouds. It continues clear and blue overhead, but the brightness has passed away. We cannot tell how the shadow began, or from what quarter it came. It will go as it came, without apparent cause, perhaps without observation. These inward shadows have mostly their significance. Sometimes they herald the coming of an unusual grace. Sometimes they warn us of the approach of an unusual trial. Yet this last is only another form of grace, because it is the occasion of many graces. Sometimes they come and go, and we see no results. Nevertheless the soul has suffered, and there are results. But, whether these shadows prophesy graces, or portend trials, they are in themselves times of temptation, and require both skill and care in their management. These temptations are very apt to take the form of weariness, that weariness in well-doing against which the apostle warned the Thessalonians, and which in their case, as it is in ours, was likely to follow upon excitement, although our excitement need not, like theirs, arise from an immoderate interest in unfulfilled prophecy and the thickening signs of the end of the world.

It is of this weariness in the spiritual life that we are now to treat: and let us, first of all, endeavour to put it before ourselves, as we have doubtless experienced it in our own souls. We may describe it as follows. We are not

aware of having shifted our position. We do not recall any graver sin than usual, into which we have fallen. There is no notable change in our external circumstances. Nevertheless, an imperceptible languor has been for some time creeping upon us. We see it in the retrospect; but we did not see it at the time. Prayer has become an effort. Its sweetness, even its repose, has gone from it. A general disinclination to good works is added to this general disrelish of spiritual exercises. Our little mortifications lie like dead weights upon us. The most sacred actions seem likely to degenerate into routine. We feel the immense importance of an effort, but have no heart to make one. There have been times when we have thrown off far greater burdens, but this one is too much for us. We still have religious sentiments, but this is pretty nearly all the religion we have, which is sensible. The light appears to go out from the things of faith. They are blotted and confused. Our own conscience eludes us. We have no grasp of it. The power appears to have retreated from the sacraments. We have fallen, we know not how, into a state which has no little affinity to unbelief. It seems to us that we really can go on no longer. Perseverance is hopeless. Nothing has come of the past. Less is likely to come of the future. The present is vacuity. We thought we loved God. Poor souls! are we sure we do not love Him still? Alas! we might manage to die now; but dying is not the difficulty, the difficulty is—to go on living. What! another twenty years of morning meditations, of morning, noon, and night particular examens, of daily recitations of the divine office, of daily resistance to temptations, of daily defeats by the same petty unworthinesses. Does it not seem impossible? But what if matters should grow worse? What if we should come to disbelieve? What if we should at last commit a mortal sin? Intolerable

prospect ! Intolerable weariness ! Here we are succumbing, not to our passions, not to temptations, not to ponderous crosses, but simply to a feeling of being tired ! Awhile ago, and all things were clear. Now we are like men trying to read small print by strong moonlight. There is light enough, but not the right kind of light. We cannot be very far off from despair. Yet what a deadly calm there is about us ! We are like men in a nightmare, frantic because we cannot throw off a load, which has no real existence ; or like men sinking into a lethargy, whose fingers open and let fall that which they are in the act of grasping.

I think we have put matters at the worst now. I hardly think I have overstated the evil. However, I have not understated it. Of course it is serious, but it has no right to be disheartening. It may seem superfluous to talk of courage to a man who is already cowed. I ought to reason with you first. But is it not generally the case, that the most consoling thing in spiritual difficulties is to go well into them, and to study them thoroughly ? Even without any professed consolations, they always seem much less formidable afterwards. It is just the same in controversy. If you will not let people prose their own length about their difficulties, conviction rarely follows. But, in nine cases out of ten, a man who has talked his fill about his objection, finds that he has already answered it himself ; and, with some show of fight for consistency's sake, easily surrenders, and surrenders reasonably. Nevertheless let us take this comfort at starting. Is not our state in its results the same with an interior trial, through which Job was made to pass ? "Who will grant me," says he in his anguish,\* "that I might be according to the months past, according to the days in which God kept me ? When His lamp shined over my head, and I walked by His light in

\* Cap. xxix. xxx.

darkness? As I was in the days of my youth, when God was secretly in my tabernacle? And now my soul fadeth within myself, and the days of affliction possess me." The trial of a faded soul! It is hard to bear. But Job bore it, came safely to his end, and lies now in the bosom of his Heavenly Father. It will be so with us. Doubt not.

Let us think first, then, of the probable or possible causes of this weariness. Most things are adequately explained by their causes. I am inclined to think this weariness comes more often from not advancing, than from any actual faults. It is said that not to advance is to be going back in the spiritual life. I would venture to doubt the entire accuracy of this statement. When a man is endeavouring to get out of sin, it may be that every step which is not forward, is a step backward. Also in the spiritual life it may be true that all present delay makes future progress more difficult, and so less probable. But surely there are many persons whose whole life is spent at a stand-still. It is not that they are standing still themselves, but that their efforts just enable them to maintain their ground, and no more. It is like rowing a boat against a stream. There is sufficient effort to counterbalance the force of the stream, but not sufficient to surmount it. The result is, that the boat remains opposite the same place, not in spite of the rowing, but in consequence of the rowing. If the rower ceased, he would be carried down the stream; if he exerted himself more, he would make way up it. It may be said that the continuance of the effort is a great thing, and is substantially progress. It is a great thing certainly. It is forming habits. It is augmenting merits. It is keeping in a safe position. But it can hardly be called progress, at least in the ordinary sense of the word progress. Lancelotti says that not to increase our *kinds* of venial sin is progress. It is progress in the sense of keeping on the road to heaven,



but assuredly it is not progress in the ordinary acceptation of the word. It is not even full correspondence to grace; for the impulses of grace are always onward, always forgetting what has been attained, always leaving that which is behind, as the apostle tells us. Now monotony is disheartening; and when we are out of heart, we are at once weary, however little we have laboured. If we go on rowing, and we have not passed that tree on the bank all the while, we are discontented with ourselves; and to be discontented with ourselves is also instantaneous weariness. The sense of abundant grace falling upon us, and no results following, or very inadequate results, is sure to fatigue us in the long run, and to bring on peevishness, and then vexation, and then discouragement. Moreover, there are few of us who can do without success. The fountains of self-love are not self-supplying. Natural activity cannot fast; it is much if we can get it to abstain. Whatever amount of effort may go to maintain us in the same spot, it is not success. We get disgusted; and disgust implies weariness. Thus it is that the mere fact of not advancing does in most cases account for that feeling of being tired, which unnerves us, and is a real hindrance to us in the pursuit of holiness.

We must not, however, forget that many of the phenomena of the spiritual life spring from physical causes. Our body can go wrong short of illness, short of ailment. It is a very delicate and capricious instrument. The reaction after hard work, different seasons of the year, individual constitution, very slight atmospherical disturbances, all of them tend to bring forth many moral results, without the intervention of actual pain or positive malady. This is a very difficult subject to handle. It is full of dangers. We are all of us too much inclined to make concessions to our bodies. Reliance on comforts is quite incompatible with

true liberty of spirit. The worship of health is one of the most efficient and extensive causes of lukewarmness and indevotion. At the same time the fact is true, that our soul is very much dependent on our body. If we begin attributing to supernatural causes, whether to the operations of grace or to the wiles of Satan, what is really a matter of nerves or of digestion, we are soon in the land of mischievous delusions. We become discouraged when we have no need to be so, and elated when we have no right to be so. We believe our inner self to be the theatre of much that is not going on there at all, and our self-knowledge becomes clouded by exaggeration.

But the important thing to be considered is, that our physical difficulties have to be sanctified just as much as our spiritual difficulties. Bodily disturbance is no dispensation from duty, until it begins to be something like an incapability, or at least until the attempt to discharge the duty would be an imprudence. This is the common mistake. Granted, that our evil temper comes just now from nerves or indigestion: but not granted, that it is on that account to be any the less combated. The monstrous assumption, which we most of us make, is that this corporal annoyance, which accounts for our irritability or any other sin, also excuses it. For this there is not a shadow of proof. To account for a thing, and to excuse a thing, are two vastly different processes. Charity may use such an assumption in our judgments of others, in order to justify the ingenuity of its benignant constructions. But we cannot use it as a plea for self-acquittal, and rarely even as an argument for diminution of self-punishment. If we once so much as *begin* to do this, we have not merely taken a step off the right road, but we have fallen over a precipice. The same reasoning obviously applies to mental unwellness, to sorrow, vexation, misfortune, uncertainty, the sense of injustice,

wounded feelings, or the chafing of responsibilities. These harassments are the sources of many things which go wrong in the spiritual life. But while they account for them, they do not excuse them. For these bodily and mental necessities and infirmities are just what we have to defend ourselves against, and bring into subjection to grace. At the same time, we shall be more simple, childlike, genuine, and straightforward, when we attribute the discomfiting phenomena, without surprise, to these natural causes, than when we fancy all manner of supernatural possibilities which have no real existence in our case, and the thought of which is in itself enough to do us harm, because it engenders in us a kind of confused and underground feeling that we are suffering, or being put through, something in common with the saints. Now it is plain that weariness is just the kind of misery, which bodily disturbance or mental anxiety would be likely to produce. For both body and mind chafe the soul, and chafing makes it fretful, and fretfulness is near of kin to weariness.

At the same time I am far from denying the almost incessant action of the Evil One upon our souls in the spiritual life, or from confining it to the higher and more unusual conditions of those aiming at perfection. It is not the saints only who fight with devils. We all do so. Or if we do not do so, it is because we already belong to Satan, and are his property. There is no doubt that our weariness is very often from this preternatural source ; and it must be acknowledged that the thought is a very discouraging one. Yet it is foolish to expect that there should be no discouragement in the life-long effort to win heaven. There are worse things in spirituality than discouragement, bad as it is. But perfect humility alone is exempt from it. We must be content therefore to feel that the Evil One has great power over us, even against our own will, but that he cannot force us to

sin. He can only make us suffer. God is our Father ; and so He that is for us is greater than all those who are against us. There are perhaps no infallible signs by which we can tell when our languor comes from this preternatural source. But we may generally suppose that such is its origin, when we feel it in spiritual things, and not in other things, when it comes on us instantaneously, when it affects the exercises of the interior life more than the discharge of external duties, and when it keeps palpably increasing without any visible cause to which we can refer it. Still, even when we suppose our weariness thus to come upon us, we are neither to struggle less determinedly against it, nor to imagine that we ourselves are to be forthwith acquitted of all blame in the matter.

Not unfrequently this weariness is a punishment for past sin. When the Holy Ghost is grieved, the soul is weary. An intermittent piety is especially punished in this way. If we are easy in allowing outward interruptions to break in upon our usual devotions, if for slight ailments we suspend our ordinary prayers, if we permit anxieties and occupations to make us omit our frequentation of the sacraments, and, above all, if we are not punctual and systematic in our examinations of conscience, the feeling of weariness comes upon us as we return to them. In the ordinary course of things perseverance implies freshness. Yesterday is an impulse to to-day, and to-day will be an impulse to to-morrow. Being pious by jerks is common enough ; but it is sure to be a failure. Excitements may awaken us out of sin, but they cannot constitute real progress.

But of all the faults which are punished by this weariness, the most common, and the one which has most affinity to its punishment, is the want of recollection. Dissipated thoughts, exuberant, unweighed words, an impatience under solitude, distracted prayers, objectless frittering away of time,

passive half-unconscious dreaming, all this is want of recollection. It loosens our hold upon God. It blunts our sense of His presence. It unmans the soul, and relaxes all its powers, as if we had swallowed some deleterious drug. Even in our solitude we may be unrecollected ; for silence does not of itself ensure recollection. We may have dissipating pursuits. We may read too much, or too variously. We may forget Thomas à Kempis' advice, that we had better be content to be ignorant of many things. We may spread our attention over too wide a surface. We may load our minds with too great an abundance of games. We may even insensibly let the thought of God do duty for direct prayer to God. Certainly, when a man is alone, he has to hold his tongue ; and the mere holding of our tongues is the cessation of two-thirds of the venial sins of our lives. Nevertheless contemplative vocations are rare, and when a man has not such a vocation, solitude, which is anything more than occasional, dissipates him more than work will do. It is easy to unspiritualise our solitude. We know that we have done so, when we become unbusinesslike in our devotions. An intolerable fit of weariness is at hand. We must be almost as quick as lightning, like sailors in a squall, if we would get ready to meet it safely, or rather to bear it safely, for it comes upon us mostly from behind. It is occasionally a prophecy of the future, it is most often a child of the past.

Self-will also has a peculiar power to bring on this weariness. I do not mean self-will in religious things only, but a course of self-will even in things indifferent. There is something especially corrupting in the following of our own wills, however trifling the things in which we follow them may be. This is why St. Paul tells us to do everything for the glory of God. This is why kindness is such a help to piety, because it gives us an external motive in almost all

the social or domestic occurrences of the day. To have no master is to be a slave. The despotism of liberty is the most degrading of all despotisms. It vilifies all that is noble and generous in our nature. It is incompatible with magnificence of action. The grandiloquence of self-praise is the highest eminence it can reach. Moreover, of all despots, self-will is the most baseborn, and has also the fewest acquired capabilities of governing. It is this which makes superiority so seldom sanctifying, and superiors so hardly saved. O how little-minded any superiority makes us! If it made us narrow-hearted as well, we should be hopeless. If then you let self-will ride you even in things indifferent, it will gallop you to death, and you will be good for nothing for weeks afterwards.

Then, again, there is a weariness which is the mere weariness of perseverance. There is something in perseverance which is uncongenial to the caprice and instability of our nature. To judge from what we see, perseverance even in the uniformity of sin is difficult, notwithstanding that our corrupt propensities incline us in the same direction. Still more then is this the case with perseverance in a line of conduct, which is always more or less of a constraint, because it is an incessant warfare. There is a monotony in well-doing, and it is not a monotony of success. The same resolutions, same efforts, the same partial failure, the same round of humbling experience, which has become as familiar to us and as uninteresting as counting a hundred,—these things, when they go on for years, and are stripped of all excitement, which is as oil to the wheels of our natural activity, begin to bear very hard upon us. Instead of growing easier, as a habit in natural things does, piety grows harder. It seems as if the burden increased with the numerical sum of years. Sometimes circumstances combine to render it almost intolerable. We are like men hanging



over a cliff. Our whole weight hangs upon our fingers, and they are grasping a rock which their own moisture renders every moment more slippery. We feel that, if some unexpected succour does not come, our destruction is but an affair of minutes. The tide of grace is not uniform. It has its neaps as well as its springs. We have for the most part no idea how large a proportion of our continuance in devotion is due to grace, and not to our own efforts. If the tide of grace ebbs unusually low for a time, it is quite a terror to us to see how little we have to do with our own goodness, how little absolutely, and how much less than we heretofore conceived was possible. It is a wholesome terror. The feeling of utter dependence upon grace is half perseverance. Our confidence in God is always in proportion to our want of confidence in ourselves. Our helplessness is the hopeful feature of our grace. Nevertheless these ebbs of grace, these appearances of our perseverance being worn through and threadbare, are trying moments. In mercy they generally last but a little while. But when they come in middle life, when the fervour of our beginnings is past, and spiritual habits are not yet mature, they are especially hard to bear, and we seldom pass through them without a loss.

Then, last of all, there is no doubt a weariness which is altogether supernatural, wholly an operation of grace, or at least a divine permission. God sends it to us, not so much as a punishment for sin, as one of the processes by which our soul is to be cleansed, and fitted for higher things. It is also true that these divine visitations are not confined to contemplative souls, or only accompany the more delicate and less common operations of grace. They are perhaps more common than we suppose. Nevertheless they are rare. All I need observe about them here is, that there is no necessity we should know when our weariness is directly from God. Indeed it is generally an essential part of the trial that we

should not know it. It is not necessary to know it, because the knowledge would not alter our manner of dealing with it. It would only be a comfort. It would not be required in order to moderate our discouragement. For, if the trial came to us as an operation of grace, it would probably bring with it a degree of humility which would counterbalance the discouragement.

These are the sources from which this feeling of weariness may proceed. Let us next look at the mischief which it does.

It makes us leave off good works, or suspend spiritual exercises. It breeds in us a spurious kind of prudence. Because we feel a burden, we argue that we have taken too much upon ourselves. We have committed ourselves to God indiscreetly. We must draw back while we can. We must abridge our hours of prayer. We must strike off some of our little mortifications, because, though very little, they are exceedingly tiresome. We reason like men who think they need not keep Lent, because fasting weakens them, and more or less tells upon their health, which of course it was meant to do within certain bounds. It is in our seasons of weariness that we come down the mountain a little, and put ourselves on a slightly lower level, and applaud our timely discretion. Alas! many slight descents come to make a considerable descent in time, and we, who began with determining to be saints,—where are we now?

When weariness does not cause us to leave things off, it leads us to do them badly and perfunctorily. We think our fatigue an adequate dispensation from vigilance and recollection, as a man who is preaching at Lent does not trouble himself so much as usual about distractions in saying Office. Now what if it should be true in the spiritual life, that the not doing of a thing at all, provided it is not of obligation, is a less evil than the doing of it badly? I should not wonder

if it were so. Indeed I am inclined to suspect it is. At any rate the ill-doing of a good thing is a very great evil. For it not only renders unmeritorious those works by which we might greatly merit, but it makes them also perfect nests of venial sins. Moreover such fraudulent doing of God's work has a special curse attached to it in Scripture, and is full of grave consequences to the soul.

Furthermore, weariness makes us impatient of God's company. Holiness is the companionship of God. It requires a renovation of the heart by grace, the infusion of heavenly instincts, a complete revolutionising of our natural tastes, an unearthly appreciation of things, before we can taste this company of God, and find it sweet. There must be a great change in us before He can be our resting-place. We need conversion. We require strengthening with that "perfect" or "principal" spirit, of which David speaks in the fiftieth psalm. Now it is our spiritual tastes, which are the first things for weariness to vitiate. God becomes dull to us. He is uninteresting. He is undemonstrative. He cannot be in the wrong, because He is God. But he is not positively attractive. How ever was it, that we took such delight in prayer? That overpowering sweetness, was it not simply a physical affair? That little dawn of love of suffering which began to lighten in our hearts, was it not some foolish delusion? That delicious feeling of sinking lower and lower in the sense of our own unworthiness, was it not all a mistake, or perhaps a dream? We not only cannot feel as we felt before, but we cannot believe that we ever felt so before. Converts sometimes do a blameless wrong to those who are still unconverted, because they cannot even in thought make themselves masters of their old position. So we cannot understand now the relation in which we once stood to God. On the contrary, though we dare not put it into words so plainly, His vicinity has become an annoyance to us. His

very condescension frets us. We would be peevish in our prayers, if we dared. We almost repent we ever went so far with Him. Is not this a misery? To be weary of God, to turn away with impatience from our eternal home, to have taken the bloom off this world and to be sick of the other! We tire of Him, never to be tired of whom is in itself our everlasting bliss! Oh, if we die in the attempt, we must push on. We cannot be quiet for an hour under the pressure of such unblessed fatigue as this.

But this leads further. It leads into that endless, hopeless business of seeking consolations and recreations outside of God, and shortly afterwards, far away from God. I sometimes think that to be near God but outside of Him is to be at a greater distance, than when we are far away from Him, as we speak in the spiritual life. To wish to be comforted by any one but Him is always a sad misfortune, and very often a positive sin. But to turn away from Him, and seek in creatures what we profess not to have found adequately in Him,—this is surely of all miseries the nearest to a state of sin. As I said, it is an endless and a hopeless business. There is no end to it, because it is a search which can never find, a chase which never can come up with its prey, a journey which has no termination. Like bees among distasteful flowers, we fly from one to another, hardly lighting, merely tasting; but the honey which we taste is drugged. It stimulates, or intoxicates, or makes us drowsy. Thus our taste becomes more and more vitiated. We are just as far as ever from finding what we sought, but we are immeasurably farther from what we have left. Strange to say! creature-consolation becomes more of a necessity to us, the less we are satisfied by it. The more completely we despair of finding it, the more obstinately do we persist in seeking it. It is a kind of spiritual debauchery, which at last will leave the soul a perfect wreck, with all its powers of self-

recovery gone, and with no possible hope except in a miracle of grace, the only likelihood of which is in that peculiar love of God, which seems to be only the more patiently excited by the special unlovingness of our desertion of Him. When we see a soul in such a state as this, we involuntarily hold our breath, as when we see a man upon the verge of some perilous height. What then should we think and feel, if our own soul is consciously travelling that way?

This vain research of creature consolation, like all failures, and more than most failures, makes us peevish with others. We wreak our disappointment upon them, as if they were to blame because they were creatures, and could not do what God has reserved to Himself alone the right of being able to do. Peevishness, as usual, brings with it the feeling of a bad conscience; and anything like true prayer becomes almost impossible. In this state of perpetual irritation we soon become disgusted with ourselves, and this disgust is so little like a humble hatred of ourselves that it is incompatible with it. It is the very antipodes of humility. It borders closely upon despair, which, rightly considered, is nothing more than the extinguishing of humility. But we cannot live in such a state as this. It would be too unbearable. We must restore peace of some kind to our soul. We must sweeten our dispositions by some means or other. This leads us yet a step lower. We give in to natural repose. We seek compensation in bodily comforts, for what we suffer in spiritual things. Self-indulgence gives us a kind of amiability: spurious indeed, and perhaps only temporary. Yet it serves for the moment, and we are content. This is the end of our feeling of weariness. It has not so much torn open our spiritual life, as unstitched it. But it has done this completely. The old original leaving of our bodily comforts was our first step towards union with God, and here we are arrived at them again.

Who then will dare to leave unwatched, or passively to bear, this insidious feeling of being tired, which comes to such an evil end at last?

But, before we conclude, we ought to say something on the treatment of this weariness. This will not take us long, because so much has been implied already. We must remember, first of all, that our struggle against it must be equal, whatever the source of the weariness may be; because the danger is equal, whatever may be the excuse. We must not fret and toss under it, like a sick man who cannot sleep; but still we must not be passive. In the next place we must watch with an exceeding jealousy, against all worshipping of health. The encroachments of this idolatry are very insidious. No other angel of darkness simulates an angel of light so well.

None can argue so well, or talk so reasonably, or so successfully feign the excellences of moderation and discretion. Nevertheless all spiritual writers agree, that it is one of the most common, as well as most fatal, enemies of devotion. When it has established itself, weariness is its firstborn. Health has of course to be considered, because it not only involves our external work, which represents our duties to others, but it also rules our interior life, which is our intercourse with God. On the whole, in cases of doubt, it is safer to decide against health than for it. But the safest thing of all is to follow the dispassionate judgment of others, provided that on the one hand our questions are put fairly, and are not mere fishings for particular answers, and on the other that we have not chosen a guide, who through good-nature or indifference will always ratify the demands of our own softness. Yet this is hard to do; for, after all, the sick man is the only man in most cases who understands what he suffers, better than either priest or physician. Yet we know that if he made this his rule of action with his



body, he would soon be dead; and the case is the same with the treatment of his soul.

It is a custom, which many have practised with advantage when this weariness has been upon them, to bind themselves by vows for extremely short periods; vows to get up at a certain hour in the morning, or to examine their conscience for a given time before going to bed, or to persevere in that thing, whatever it may be, which the feeling of weariness makes us imagine just then to be impossible. But this also is a rule, which can only be followed under advice. We must also regulate our actions very carefully. Punctuality, always a thing of huge importance in the pursuit of perfection, is now indispensable. It has become a matter of life and death. We must be quiet and not precipitate, steady and not intermittent. We must deal firmly with ourselves, but it must be a very gentle firmness. We must consider our weariness either as a punishment to be endured reverently, or as a suffering to be borne in union with the Passion of our Blessed Lord. Above all, we must fix our energies courageously on it, and not allow ourselves to underrate its importance. What we have already said will surely persuade us to this most cogently. For we have seen that it first of all undoes old and long habits of good, secondly that it leads to a nausea of spiritual things, and thirdly that it pushes us to the distinct abandonment of the higher level we took at first, and to the taking of a lower one, which will most probably have also to be abandoned in its turn.

But it is a great trial, and I wish I could console you more efficaciously under it. It is a very real suffering. Nevertheless we must either push on, or give up the strife. As to this last, I do not say, Who will dare to do it, but rather, Whose love of God will let him do it? It is cruel to drag a man up and down a room after he has been over-

dosed with laudanum, while he is moaning with weariness, and entreating to be allowed to lie down and sleep. Yet it is one of those cruelties which are part of the imperiousness of mercy. So we must let ourselves be shaken, and forced onwards, and pricked with needles, if need be, and beaten as though we were flagging beasts of burden. I take it for granted, that we are clear about our not doing as much for God as we very well might do. Let us hold on, tired as we are. We shall be less tired, when we come to our second wind, if we may be allowed so to name that second fervour, which is so often granted to the lukewarm, and which spiritual writers too much ignore. Life is short. The thing is—to be ready to die, and to be free from reproach at that dread hour: and is there one of us who would quite like to die, doing as little for God as we are doing now?

## *WOUNDED FEELINGS.*

THE geography books of olden times used to speak of regions of the globe, land or ocean, where monsters dwelt and storms were always raging, where sun and moon and wind and wet, and day and night, and the four seasons, kept neither times nor rules, and set at nought the laws of meteorology, and where mysterious magnetic influences reigned, beyond man's understanding or control. They were spots which superstitious mariners might people with attractive horrors; and to others, if they were less interesting than the real wonders of physical geography, they had an air of mysterious horror round them, which is not without its attraction still. The world of wounded feelings is like one of these fabulous worlds of old geography. It follows no rules. The needle ceases to point to the north. It lies apart from all analogies. It is a region of unreasonable things. It is full of contradictions and of confusions. Everything, which happens in it, is unexpected from the very fertility of its lawlessness. There is hardly such a thing as humanity in it. It is peopled by individual souls, and each soul is a species by itself. Is there much practical good, then, in penetrating into the centre of that anomalous world? Is there any chance of its vagaries being reduced into a science? Perhaps not. Yet observation will teach us a great deal; and we have hardly a right to say that there is nothing to be said of a region, which most men cross in their way to heaven, and which is precisely the region which those, who

are most capable of perfection, cross at its broadest place, and so are longest in crossing.

I suppose there are few men in life who have not at times, or once at least, sat down and wondered, whether life were worth the living. If we will not let faith speak, there is a great deal to be said on both sides. Faith tyrannises over the question so completely, that it ceases to be a question in her presence. Upon the whole, however, men seem to like life. I infer this, not only from their reluctance to part with it, but from their evident zest in living. The most unhappy man I have ever seen, I see him now in my mind's eye, obviously relished his life exceedingly. The least tolerable thing in life is perhaps its monotony. Somehow the life that is fullest of attractions comes to drag at last. Almost all lives have got a lame limb. Nevertheless, if we strike a balance between living and not living, it is in favour of living, with such a surplus that it is not worth while going back to look for errors in our summing. No conceivable errors would put the total the other way. But here is a remarkable thing, that gifted lives are those, about which we may most reasonably doubt whether they are worth living. Gifts bring with them an inheritance of pains, as if they were out of place in a fallen world like this. The extreme delicacy of any one sense brings with it more additional annoyances than extra pleasures. Fineness of perception, delicacy of taste, keenness of appreciation, liveliness of imagination, excessive sensitiveness of feeling, —all these things bring exquisite pleasure with them; but in a world, whose constitution has been deranged by sin, they expose us to continual shocks and jars, which often more than counterbalance the enjoyment. This is only what we should expect. Obtuse people feel less than others. They feel sin less, and the disproportionateness of things; and the host of minor evils which haunt life from its begin-

ning to its end. Nevertheless all these gifts are great helps to perfection. Some spiritual writers have spoken of some of them as if they were indispensable. Certainly of some of them it is true, that where saints have not had them naturally, grace has infused them. It is of one of these things that I am going to speak to you now, a great help, or a great hindrance in the spiritual life, a source of peculiar pleasure and a cause of peculiar pain in the natural life,—easily wounded feelings, the gift or the curse of sensitiveness.

Sensitiveness is neither a virtue nor a vice. But it is not on that account less intimately connected with the spiritual life. As years go by, their varying circumstances gradually disclose to us depths and peculiarities of our own character, which are deeply concerned with holiness, yet are not in themselves either virtues or vices. They are capabilities of both, and can with equal facility lend themselves to either. They are points in our character, at which we begin to go wrong, or at which grace exhibits a predilection to graft itself. Thus they are strengths as well as weaknesses. Sensitiveness is one of the most important of these things. I do not see how sublime virtue can be reached without it, while on the other hand we behold every day into what depths of incalculable meanness it can plunge great minds, affectionate hearts, and strong characters. It is the secret cause of one half of the disedifying inconsistencies of religious people. It rules us more powerfully than any of our passions. It absorbs our character into itself, until it alone almost becomes our character. It makes everything in life exquisite and exaggerated. Our pleasures and our pains are both exquisite. It belongs especially to affectionate dispositions; yet it is not the same thing as tenderness. We must be careful not to confound them. Tenderness comes much nearer to being a virtue. But sensitiveness

without tenderness is a very terrible thing. When separated from it, sensitiveness is for the most part allied with cruelty, and cruelty is a complete disability to be a saint. Cruel men are more common than we might have supposed; for modern society exhibits great facilities and conveniences for cruelty. Many men are tyrants in the secret domestic relations of life, who are not only bland and yielding in society, but even charm us by a manifestation of humility, which is not simulated, neither is it altogether unreal. Cruelty and humility often combine very strangely. Nay, what too often is domestic life, because of this cruelty, but a veil behind which lie interminable regions of unhappiness, trodden wildly or trodden wearily by unsuspected thousands every day?

Sensitive men are also very quick and keen in their sympathies; but these sympathies are very narrow. Generally speaking, such men can only sympathise with sorrows which they themselves have passed through. Their hearts cannot outgrow the circle of their own experience. They are often not large-hearted men, neither are they forgiving men. There is indeed much narrowness both of mind and heart about sensitiveness, when it is not found in combination with other things. It is always degenerating into umbrageousness, and so darkening the heart, unless that heart is peculiarly blithe and sunny in itself. A man, who is sensitive without being elastic, is a false character, and will always be found on trial far worse than he seems. Last of all, a sensitive man is generally disinclined to an interior life. Whether it is that all probing is so painful to him that he shrinks from it, or that he has a wider experience than other men of his power of self-delusion, or that he finds outward kindness a charity so difficult to him that he overvalues it, so it is, that we mostly find very sensitive men highly impatient of an interior life, and almost inclined



to treat it with contempt. It irritates them so strangely, that we may be sure there is something in it which is deeply uncongenial to them. At the same time, as we shall see afterwards, sensitiveness confers almost a microscopic power upon the conscience, and so enables us to perceive the finer shades of evil, and to correspond to the more delicate operations of grace. For the present, let this be enough as a general description of sensitiveness, and its affinities.

It is a common gift in its ordinary degrees, but very uncommon in its highest degrees. But in almost all hearts the amount of liability to wounded feelings is hardly credible beforehand. It is sufficient completely to obscure our judgment, to deceive our affections, and to make us forget proprieties in our outward demeanour. Men are constantly placing themselves in false and foolish positions under its influence. They can only avoid this either supernaturally through great grace, or naturally through a keen sense of the ridiculous, which is one of our greatest safeguards through life. Sensitiveness is therefore on the whole, a common phenomenon in the spiritual life, so common as to justify our making it the subject of a separate investigation. All hearts quiver when they are touched. If some do not, there are only exceptions enough to prove the rule. Piety, if anything, keenly quickens this natural sensitiveness. Indeed in its earlier stages it quickens it almost to a morbid extent. This is one of the unlovelinesses, which cling about recently converted people. It makes their devotion only a new capability of censoriousness. Thus the mortification of it becomes one of the primary duties of the spiritual life; and the intense suffering which this causes is the ladder by which we climb higher.

I wish to call your attention to this matter, not only because it is a very practical one, but also because I think we hardly do justice to sensitiveness. We speak of wounded

feelings, as if they were far more wrong than they are. We confound them with the consequences which follow from them when they are not under the dominion of grace. Our own attainments are perhaps too low to enable us to estimate the magnificent fruits of wounded feelings, when they are consecrated by grace. Our tone about wounded feelings is given to be exaggerated, exaggerated condemnation. This leads to many evils; but two especially, unscrupulousness and discouragement. Theology tells us that our Blessed Lord's body was especially formed for suffering. In like manner we should suppose that His Sacred Heart was sensitive above all other hearts. It is this which carries the sufferings of His Passion deeper down than we can follow them. Our sensitiveness, as well as our other characteristics, must be exalted into a conformity with His. Let us look at it, therefore, with fairness and moderation. If wounded feelings are a fountain of venial sins, they are also a capability of great holiness. They do not want killing; they want supernaturalising. Perhaps it is not possible for us to make ourselves obtuse; but it is an enormous mischief even to try to do so. If we succeed, then we have stereotyped our present lowness in grace, and have gained nothing but a worthless diminution of some of the noblest pains of life. Thus the mortification of sensitiveness is a peculiar process. It is not a blunting, or stunning, or putting to death of sensitiveness, as it is with vices. But it is a brave making use of the torture of our wounded feelings to get nearer God and to be kinder to men. What we have to avoid is the common error of blaming the feelings, instead of blaming consequences which would never come of them, if we corresponded to our grace. We must bear in mind at all times this peculiarity of mortifying our wounded feelings, as distinguished from other mortifications. This is not a mere subtlety, or a piece of

metaphysical straw-splitting. I grant that there is a legitimate prejudice against refined distinctions: but we cannot do without them in the spiritual life. Coarseness and roughness spoil everything there. Simplicity is the highest grace, and the last reached; and what is simplicity but an almost incredible supernatural refinement?

Sensitiveness affects us in various ways. It makes us fanciful. We imagine offence has been intended where it was never dreamed of. It constructs entire imaginary histories upon what is often no foundation at all. Even where there is a basis of truth, it builds upon it more than it will bear. It magnifies and exaggerates things. It puts the wildest constructions upon innocent actions. It mistakes indifference for intensity. It imagines subtlety where there has only been carelessness. It throws a monstrous significance into a chance phrase, and then broods on it for years, literally for years. From being fanciful we pass to being suspicious. Where we do not see phantoms, we are sure they are lying in ambush. We start at shadows. We make all life like riding a mettlesome horse by moonlight, when there are shadows at every turn; and there are few things more irksome or more irritating. Our mind is crowded with suspicions. We forget God. We become distracted in prayer. We are hardly able to distinguish between what is shadow and what is substance. We give shadows the power to harm us, as if they were substances. It is difficult to say whether we grow more intolerable to ourselves, or to those around us. From being suspicious we pass to being umbrageous. We grow moody, and bitter. We add sulkiness to our suspicions. There is no dealing with us. If an offender begs our pardon, we do not forgive him. We discover some new offence in the very act. He had no right to beg our pardon. He put himself into a position of superiority by doing so. We are angry with him

for it. It is just like him. It is a piece of conceit and forwardness. He should have waited till we made the advances. We will not believe he is sincere. On whichever side men take us, they will find us equally unmanageable. They will meet with nothing but rebuffs. Now what grace, what conceivable Christlike thing, can grow in such an atmosphere as this?

But shadows distort the bulk of things. So, when we are umbrageous, all our feelings connected with the subject-matter which annoys us, are disproportionate. This leads us into all manner of mistakes. We attach the wrong things to the wrong persons. We do not know where to take our aim, the outline of the shadows is so swollen and uncertain. We make people think we are much worse than we really are. When we come forward of our own accord, we do so in an ungraceful way. When on the contrary men come upon us, our manner is startled and menacing. Hence comes excitement, excitement which by morosely brooding over itself becomes a sort of subordinate madness. Then it is that we become almost incurable. For then it is that we become as sure that we are in the right, as if it had been revealed to us. The proofs of the unkindness of others are overwhelming. We put our evidence together, and get up our case against our best friend, it may be, or at least against an unhappily offending friend, as a barrister gets up a case against a murderer. The excitement burns our judgment into us, as the fire anneals the porcelain and fixes the pattern and the colours. We shall never change our minds now. Then come the sins, outstreaming like a mountain-torrent, — thoughts, words, actions, manifold displays of outward irritability. Every one of these is most likely irrevocable. We have dropped a mere word of bitterness, and it clings like a stain to the poor offender for life. It maims his power of doing good. It throws a shadow over

his sunshine. We stand between God and him. Yet perhaps the offence was imaginary, or perhaps it was nothing like so great, and after all, what was it when weighed against past kindnesses? We have now got very far. We have come in sight of hatred. It is possible now for us to hate. Possible, yet is not the mere possibility terrific? O who can set bounds to the unmercifulness of a sensitive man?

This is the bad side of things. Here is plenty of occupation for a holy self-revenge. There is abundance to mortify in all this. We must be very unsparing of ourselves. A touch will not cure the matter. We must hold the caustic firmly, and press it hard, and keep it long on the place, even while we tremble, and are on the brink of fainting. We must remember we have come in sight of hatred in our own souls, and no panic is out of proportion to such a terror. We may plead our health, as being in a great measure to blame for these ugly developments of our sensitiveness. Very likely this is true. It often seems as if men had only a given quantity of grace, a given quantity of patience for example; and the endurance of pain draws upon the bank till it breaks, and we have no patience left to pay others with, in the little rubs and affronts of daily life. Indigestion will make, even a bright-minded, limpid-hearted man unbrageous. But the truth of all this is no defence, and only a poor extenuation. But at any rate it is no exemption from the obligation of mortifying these wounded feelings. We must be swift also, as well as unsparing. We must work day and night, as men do on the railway when a bridge has broken down. All traffic between heaven and ourselves is interrupted, till we have got the ruin out of the way. Those grim labourers by torchlight in the thick darkness of night, they are our models in this desperate task of mortifying our wounded feelings.

I do not think that sensitiveness is an evidence of our fallen state, but only that certain developments of it are so. On the contrary I believe that in itself it is a grand gift : and that he is most fortunate who is most sensitive. Yet it runs into what is wrong so swiftly that it always seems wrong, and therefore causes us more unhappiness than it need do. The quickness to feel an unkindness, the tenderness which makes us shrink before we are touched, the subtlety which causes us to fancy unkind intentions when there were none, the delicacy which is almost crushed by little roughnesses,—these are evidently without a shadow of sin. They are not moral actions. They are both involuntary and indeliberate. They are our character and constitution. Grace may change and elevate them, may fortify them with a gift of the Holy Ghost, and counterbalance them by making us love God more fervently and care for His interests more exclusively. But meanwhile they are not wrong in themselves. Moreover the first moments of our sensitiveness, the first ideas, the first imaginations, the first impulses, are wholly free from sin ; and many persons would be much happier if they could always bear this in mind. We are cast down if we feel a thing with exceeding keenness, which is in reality a feeling we cannot help, a feeling which if it is to be overcome, can only be overcome gradually and in the long run, as the result of continuous processes of grace. Our self-annoyance ought not to begin till we proceed to act upon our sensitiveness, whether inwardly by deliberate thoughts and that brooding which is a proximate occasion of sins against charity, or outwardly, by word, manner, or action. Neither is the undiminished keenness of feeling to be regarded as any proof of immortification ; yet how often are people overwhelmed with sadness because they have mistaken it for one !

In order to understand in what the mortification of our



sensitiveness consists, let us take a case. Some shadow has come between us and one whom we love, and whom we continue to love in spite of the shadow. The shadow broadens, lengthens, thickens, we hardly know how. Words of his are reported to us. They have a dubious, if not an unkind sound, about them. We are stung, and the pain is so great that we wince under it. We know very well that words taken out of their context are very different from what they are in it. Experience has taught us that reported words are hardly ever exact; and even when exact, they put on a new character by being separated from manner, tone, look, and circumstances. The unkindness of reported words is more often from the mind of the reporter, than from the mind of the original speaker. A man given to report things is never a kind man. He is no better than a bird of prey, given to feed on the garbage of the baser parts of our poor nature. We know all this. Nevertheless we are stung with the words. They rankle. There was poison on the arrows. Then come some actions, or looks of our friend, which admit of an unkindly interpretation. Our first impulse is to interpret them by our own pain at the former words. Like the roots of trees, it is the nature of a misunderstanding to entangle itself as it grows. It is its instinct to outgrow the possibility of ever being explained. It is easier to cut out a cancer than to disengage from the heart a misunderstanding which has once had time to harden there. The shadow then still continues. We do not speak. But our friend is, unconsciously perhaps, causing us the most exquisite torture by nearly everything he says or does, or is reported to have said or done, with regard to us. Now let us also suppose that, while we have been thus wincing, we have been forcing ourselves intellectually to believe that no unkindness was intended, that we have checked ourselves sharply whenever we have caught ourselves brooding on the

matter, that we have punished in ourselves any imaginary speeches, indictments, or defences, which our imagination has indulged in, that we have accused ourselves sedulously in confession of everything which had the slightest aspect of uncharitableness, that we have not allowed ourselves to express our sensitiveness in complaints or in actions, that we have prayed more than ever for him who is the cause of our suffering, and that, when we could do so without giving him pain or discomfort, we have humbled ourselves by telling him of those inward feelings which must seem to him exaggerated and absurd, even if not petty, base, and mean, —let us suppose all this, and then, though our sensitiveness is as lively as ever and our pain as sharp, we have been by God's grace mortifying it to good purpose. It is truly miserable work. For the very struggle defiles us. Our inward life is all thrown into disarray, and kept so perhaps for months or years. There are many cases in which we cannot speak, cases in which speaking would make matters worse. There are many misunderstandings, which we shall only lay down, where so many other burdens are laid down, just on this side of the judgment-seat. Hearts are often sundered in this life, whose love of each other is growing secretly beneath the shadow of a misunderstanding; and the unexpected growth will be one of the sweet surprises of eternity. Meanwhile, if we have done what has been described above, we are not only without sin, but we have earned merits and have gone heavenwards by strides rather than by steps. We have acted nobly, as our infirmity and littleness may lawfully count nobility. Yet years of this inward strain may not, perhaps, allay our sensitiveness one iota. When we lie down to die, we may have the same feeling of being flayed alive, which we have now. It is not always so, but it is often so. Some men grace makes blessedly insensible; other men it makes more tender and

susceptible. I would rather have this last gift than that other blessing.

In the process of mortifying our sensitiveness we must also bear in mind that the sensitiveness of each one of us is peculiar. We share it with no one else. It is individual. It is part of our idiosyncrasy. We may resemble this man rather than another. But a resemblance is all. No man's sensitiveness is quite the same as another man's. It depends on combinations of character, which nature does not appear ever to repeat exactly. We must therefore learn our own. This is of importance in two ways. Things may be wrong in others which are not wrong in us; and the knowledge of this will sometimes save us from discouragement. Again, things may be excusable in others which are inexcusable in us; and the knowledge of this will hinder our defending and dispensing ourselves where we have no right to do so. We must also remember that the tendency of sensitiveness is always towards selfishness. An unusually affectionate man is generally a man of unusual self-love; and sensitiveness is a department of the affections. It comes from what is good. Indeed it comes from what is too good for the present state of things. Hence it often does a mischief here, while it is in itself a prophecy, or rather an actual germ, of some undeveloped excellence of our eternity.

I have defended sensitiveness, and yet I have been saying a great many strong things against it. So I must not conclude without saying something about its privileges. Even in natural things it is the source of our keenest and most refined enjoyment. It is sensitiveness alone which finds out what lies under the monotony of life, and so gives us spirits to bear it. It glorifies all our joys, and makes sorrows more tolerable by its carrying them deeper down into our hearts. While it widens the sphere of our love, it also intensifies its action. It gives a zest to the practice

of virtue, which is in natural things what divine sweetness is in spiritual things. But its grand privilege is, that it makes us especially capable of the higher graces of sanctity. There is a delicacy or subtlety, in the more uncommon operations of grace, which appears to require something congenial in the natural character, on which it may graft itself. Thus sensitiveness is the best basis for a great grace of charity, because it is an almost infinite power of sympathy. It reveals to us the finer and more interior perfections of charity. It is also infallible in its instincts for heavenly things, and quickly apprehends God, and is thus an excellent foundation for interior peace. It will thus perhaps increase our joy in heaven, if natural character is allowed any action there, independent of the degree of supernatural love.

Sensitiveness also peculiarly enables us to understand God, to penetrate the meaning of His ways with us, to feel each touch of His grace, to discover the faintest workings of a divine vocation, and to be uneasy under any scarcely perceptible drifting away from His Will. We are enabled by it to correspond to the jealousy of God, that jealousy which is a characteristic of His sanctity, and enters so deeply into all His dealings with souls that are aiming at perfection. Sensitiveness also makes us unworldly by continually bringing home to us our unfitness for the world. It is a gift whose dower is suffering, and which therefore makes us pine in our exile, even while it is contributing joys which are the best natural consolations of that exile. It is a source of sanctification uniting in itself all the four excellences, according to which we judge of the importance and efficacy of means of grace. It is constant; it is acute; it is unsuspected; it is fatal to self-love. By unsuspected I mean two things; first, that it goes on sanctifying us even while we are not adverting to the fact, and secondly, that

so little delusion adheres to its method of operation that we may trust ourselves to it without suspicion.

Last of all, it is a peculiar Christ-like fountain of suffering. Think of the mystery of the Agony in the garden. It was a great part of that mystery that therein our dearest Lord put Himself in the place of every one of us. He bore our sins; He identified Himself with our shames; He felt our shrinkings. Our finest sensitiveness is coarse and blunt compared with His. We rudely pressed every one of the quivering keys of His Sacred Heart, and made it utter the low and plaintive notes of a sorrow beyond our understanding. He shrank, like a sensitive plant, from the shame with which we covered Him. In the other mysteries of the Passion we have outward pains, external shame, publicity, unkindness, and the desertion of friends: but the suffering of the Agony was in no slight degree, and above the other mysteries, the keenness of wounded feelings. To us, therefore, the model and the consolation in our excess of wounded feelings is that most dear and divine Heart, whose inward wound finds words in the Reproaches of Good Friday.

*CONFIDENCE THE ONLY WORSHIP.*

WHAT has God done, that His creatures do not trust Him? We cannot trust ourselves, neither can we do without trusting. We cannot hang suspended in space, from nothing and over nothing. It is plain we cannot trust each other. Confidence in God is meant to be the creature's life. Without it, we had better disbelieve whatever we do not see, while we can do no better than acknowledge that all we see is a burdensome enigma. But how is life to be lived without confidence in God? We came out of His Hand. It is true He has in some sense loosened His hold upon us, but it is only for a while. He will take us up again. We came from Him. We are going back to Him. There are but two eternal homes. They are both the work of His justice. One or other of them is inevitable. But one of them is rather an endless end than a home. We cannot fly from Him. We cannot hide from Him. What shall we do, if we cannot trust Him?

Yet confidence in God is far from common, and an adequate confidence most rare. It would be a terrible thing to say that the worship of God was rare among men; yet confidence is the only real worship. Our confidence is our religion. It is the sweetness of life. It is worth our while to have lived, if it were only to have known the delight of trusting in God. But it is not our joy only. It is our absolute necessity, and therefore belongs to the lowest of us. It is our only true perfection, and therefore belongs to



the highest of us. Let us try to bring this home to ourselves. It is one of those commonplace things, which are of the greatest importance, and yet need continual repetition. When we look even at good men, we see that what they want is confidence in God. Bishops want it, priests want it, religious want it. It is the want in the piety of almost every one. Our very confidence in God is wanting in confidence. Yet, if confidence is the only true worship, things must be very far from being what they ought to be, even with the servants of God.

Let us see then, first of all, whether this idea is anything more than a devout exaggeration. There is nothing in the world of so much importance to us as God and God's favour. Rather, it would be more true to say, that there is nothing in the world of any importance at all except that. But in order to gain and keep God's favour, and especially in order to be able to return His love, we must learn and understand Him. He is not simply a collection of all possible perfections, a resplendent object of worship. He is a living Being, who is not only in the most intimate relations with us, but who has a peculiar character of His own, upon which the whole of our love and worship of Him is moulded. Now, if we look at His character as it is implied in any one of His Attributes, or again in the entire assemblage of His Perfections, or as it is manifested to us in action in the pages of Holy Scripture, or as we see it for ourselves in the romantic providences of life, the result of our study is, that confidence in Him is the only true worship of Him. But this is not merely the doubtful result of our own investigation. He has actually told us so by His prophets again and again. The Gospel is defined by St. Paul to be an "access with confidence" to God. God Himself vouchsafes to seem as if He made a boast of His fidelity. He is perpetually calling the attention of His

creatures to it, lest they should not appreciate it rightly. It is out of His extreme compassion for us, that He lays this stress upon that perfection which most invites our confidence.

If we consider the results of confidence, we shall see how impossible it is to exaggerate its importance. Without it there can be no living faith, because living faith, in the religious sense of the word, must inevitably lead to trust. There can be no hope, unless we have confidence in the truth of Him who has promised. Charity is equally impossible, unless there is also confidence. Thus without it there can be no exercise of any of the three theological virtues. It is worship in itself without any further act, because it is an acknowledgment, not only of some perfections in Him whom we trust, but of perfections adequate to the amount of confidence we repose in Him, and that amount is only measured by fortunes and interests which are eternal, and as nearly infinite as anything belonging to the creature can be. Moreover, confidence in another is the surrender of self. We sit down no longer under our own shadow, but we go and rest beneath the sovereignty of God. Confidence in Him is the legitimate expression of our sense of responsibility to Him. It is the perpetual loyalty of conscience. The interior dispositions, which it produces in us, are childlikeness, simplicity, and calmness of spirit. Without these dispositions perfection is impossible; and without confidence in God these dispositions are impossible.

Now it must be remembered, that we are not treating at present of the sweetness of this confidence, or of the beautiful motives to it, which multiply themselves daily on the path of life. The subject is so attractive, it is hard to keep from it. The mysterious delight which the Creator is pleased to take in the trust of His creature would fill a volume by itself, if we took it up, and turned it round, and

held it in different lights, and touched with it all the affections of our hearts, one after the other. But at present we have a drier task before us. It is to show the importance of this confidence in God.

Few persons are aware of the extent of their own deficiency in this respect. Most persons take the matter so completely for granted, that they do not suspect themselves, and therefore do not examine themselves on the subject. There is something so monstrous in not trusting God, that we should have thought it must be a rare thing among good people. But experience teaches very differently. Many aim at perfection, and few attain it. In almost every case the reason of the failure is the want of confidence in God. Many persons live for years always intending to begin to form habits of prayer, or habits of particular examination of conscience, and never really begin either the one or the other. The real cause of this procrastination is want of confidence in God. Men try to give up habits of sin, and either intermit their efforts, or abandon them entirely, through want of confidence in God. When a man is scrupulous, it is mostly from want of confidence in God. Our knowledge of our own misery, which makes us brave when we have confidence in God, makes us cowardly and mean-spirited when we are destitute of that confidence. Many persons take up supernatural views of things as intellectual convictions; and yet, when they are thrown into circumstances, which as it were compel the acting on these principles, we behold not a vestige of them in their conduct. This also is a result of want of confidence in God. We really, far more than we believe, look at religion, at prayer, and at grace, as if the whole was a lottery, or something like it. A real believing prayer is by no means common. This is probably the reason why such an immensity of prayer seems unanswered. Many men content themselves with a

mere indeterminate hope, which can never carry heaven by storm as confidence does. Let us look into ourselves, and see if we really have true and solid confidence in God. Many remain beginners all their lives, because they have not confidence in God.

I have said, that in our position it is the only true worship. First of all, we are ignorant, not only ignorant of much which we should like to know, yet can do without knowing, but ignorant also of much which it deeply concerns us to know. What can we do, but trust our ignorance to the light of God's wisdom? He knows what He wants of us; He knows what He intends to do with us; He knows the evil we might do, and the evil we shall do. We know hardly anything of these important questions. We must trust Him. Even if there were any risk in trusting Him, there is no help for it. We are also feeble. We have to cope with three tremendous worlds, the huge material planet, the crowded world of men, and the invisible world of spirit. Besides this, we have the management of our own selves, at best a perilous and a dubious affair. Our means are so limited as to look absurd. Our strength is little more than infantine. What can we do better than trust our weakness to His stupendous power? Then, again, our unworthiness is more in excess than our weakness. It is hard to vilify our nature as it deserves, yet dangerous to vilify it at all. Self is deserving of our uttermost contempt, only that no contempt is safe. It merits our hearty, honest hatred; but we must trust God first, before we can hate ourselves aright. It is only when we are sinking overhead in His mercy, that our unworthiness does not impair our confidence. Yet what can we do with the comparative infinity of our unworthiness, but trust it to the absolute infinity of God's compassion? Our sins,—they are in one sense indelible. They are objects of fear to us even after they are forgiven. They are not for-

gotten. We must hear of them again one day. We must be confronted with them. The nearest approach to getting rid of them is to trust them to God's justice. It is a fearful venture; but there is the Precious Blood. As to our eternity, an interest almost too big for creatures so little, an interest which we cannot think of without trembling, He knows already what it will be: yet we must trust it to His silence. Thus it is that confidence meets the necessities of our position, while it comes nearest of all things to satisfying the requisitions of God's magnificence.

But what is this confidence? What is its nature? How do we define it? It is not a mere feeling; it is rather a faith. But it has something more than faith in it, it is a kind of sight. It adds to hope the character of assurance. It goes beyond a common habit of charity and appears to have some distant affinity with confirmation in grace; and, however distant, such an affinity is incalculably precious. It is rather the result of our whole religion, than the offspring of any one virtue. It makes us familiar with God; yet, rightly considered, it is rather a form of reverence than a form of familiarity. It is what comes of the fear of God, when that fear is wholly a grace. It is the beauty of heavenly fear. It is also no less a form of humility. It is humility in its exact balance, not sinking into cowardice on the one hand, nor mounting into presumption on the other. Confidence is the manliness of a humble soul. It is also the strength of love, not its effort or its impulse, but its abiding constitutional strength. It is love chastised, and therefore equable and steadfast. It is so eminently its nature to be practical, that it can never remain only a sentiment, or a pathos, or an inward smoothing of the soul. It breaks out into action, as if it could not be kept in; and, like the bodily vigour of youth, it is often scarcely conscious of its own exertions. Moreover it is the happiness of religion,

that sunshine in which perseverance is comparatively easy, that light in which all the virtues combine properly, and have ample room and fair play, the atmosphere in which delusion, discouragement, and indiscretion are to our relief least at their ease. It has also the same irresistible tendency to prayer which it has to action. It is almost prayer itself, that unintermitting prayer of which the Gospel speaks, and which of all things commanded looks the most like an impossibility. But, more than this, it seems to make direct prayer the necessary centre of the soul. It is always gravitating to prayer. A soul, possessed with this confidence, feels an uneasiness and has a sense of being held back, when it is not at prayer. No sooner is the pressure of distracting occupations removed, than it almost insensibly glides into prayer. It has no vacant time, because its spare time is as it were naturally prayer. It does not so much strive to pray, as it lapses into prayer. Last of all, although it is more congenial to some natural dispositions than to others, it is peculiarly a gift of God, and not a natural disposition; yet more than most gifts, it has to be earned like wages. It is essentially a grace, yet no grace has more of the nature of an acquisition.

If this be so, how then is it to be acquired? We will see,—remembering all the while that it is a grace, and not a pure acquisition of which we are speaking. We might almost say, that all the practices and experiences of the spiritual life concurred to form this confidence in our souls. It is true. Nevertheless there are certain things which have more to do with it than others, and we shall now enumerate some of these.

The thought of God is very broad. It is not so much a thought as a world of thought. It cannot be thought in one thought. Hence the importance of systematic and formal meditation on the Divine Perfections. We have seen that



our confidence in God depends greatly on our knowledge of God. We must have made His character familiar to us in prayer, in order to ground and root our confidence. Meditation on the Attributes of God is therefore one of the chief means of acquiring the grace of confidence. To this we must join meditation on the mysteries of Jesus. Neither thought nor reading nor theology will ever adequately bring home to us the breadth of redeeming grace, or the depth of the unsearchable riches of the Incarnation. Is it not our own experience, that the more we *think*, the harder salvation seems, while the more we *pray*, the easier it seems? In order to have confidence, we must know God. But this is not enough; we must know Him in Jesus Christ. It is only eternal life to know Him, when we know also His Son whom He has sent.

All our spiritual exercises, of whatever nature they may be, are so many means of acquiring confidence in God. They all let us deeper down into Him. They all unfold more and more of the nature of grace, and of the poverty of our own nature. They all bring experiences of Jesus in the soul; and each of these experiences is a new ground of confidence in Him. Our simple perseverance in anything good is a process of augmentation of our confidence. Outward temptations help us. They frighten us away from self-trust. They make us better acquainted with our possibilities of sin. They reveal to us in an alarming manner the vigour and the unweariedness of the spiritual powers, which are arrayed against us. They lead us to try all methods of keeping right, and we exhaust them, and find, that only confidence in God wears, endures, and succeeds. Inward trials lead to the same result, only still more swiftly and more infallibly. God's arms are more closely folded round us in interior trials, than in the sensible sweetnesses of His consoling visitations. A much tried man is always

a man of unbounded faith, and of a confidence in God which looks, to us of lower faith, superstitious in little things, and presumptuous in great ones.

We also acquire confidence in God by exercising confidence. It produces itself; and multiplies itself while it strengthens itself. Direct prayer for the grace is likewise an obvious means of its increase. Examination of conscience, which burrows under self-trust, and takes the ground away from under it, increases our confidence in God by the vivid manner in which it shows us the necessity of it, through the vision of our own nothingness and sin. Sacraments, especially carefully prepared confessions, have a peculiar power to increase and reinforce this gift. The same may be said of spiritual sweetness, the tendency of which is to produce a holy languor, wherein self-trust is distasteful, and we long to lie down, and rest in God. "Stay me up with flowers; compass me about with apples; because I languish with love. His left hand is under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me." Such is the language of the Spouse in the Canticle. A special devotion to the Providence of God, which seems to have possessed the souls of some of the modern saints as a scarcely conscious protest against a false philosophy, is another means of acquiring confidence in God. Even temptations against the faith, which trouble it so terribly, leave an increase of it behind them when they go, like a legacy from an unkind relation. But above all, the habit of working for God only, of doing our good for Him and caring little about its success, and of doing it secretly, which we instinctively do when we do it only for Him, is the royal road to confidence in Him. Here, you see, are a variety of means, by which we can acquire great riches of this blessed and indispensable confidence.

Let us think a little of the practice of it. The constant

profession of it must be a great part of prayer. It is so completely a part of the worship due to God, that we must profess it, even when we do not sensibly feel it. It must be in us, if we believe. We must extend it to everything which happens to us. All the events of life, all the things of this outer world, must come under its influence. In truth there is good reason for it, because, after all, human wisdom and worldly prudence are nearly as impotent in the common affairs of life, as they are in our spiritual warfare. Is it not our experience that it is always God who does things for us, even those things which we seem to do most for ourselves? Much more then must all our interior life, with its mysterious phenomena and fluctuations, be brought under the sovereignty of this tranquillising yet animating confidence. It must overflow in our hearts from God, upon all His appointments, as our Blessed Lady, the Sacraments, the blessings of the Church, the office of the priest, and the like. We must trust with a special trust all that belongs to God, or looks like Him. Our trust must be incessant, universal, prudent, and bold. In divine things there is no prudence which is not bold. It must live and work in the dark, as briskly as in the light. It must distrust itself. It must be gay, playing blithely with difficulties; for difficulties are the stones out of which all God's houses are built. Of a truth our whole generosity with God is nothing more than the measure of our confidence in Him. To sum it up in one word,—in the pursuit of sanctity confidence is progress.

Now how does the matter stand with ourselves? We have been trying to get rid of some tiresome habit of venial sin. We resolve against it; yet, while we make our resolutions, we do not believe we shall ever be able to keep them. We accuse ourselves of it at confession, and make, not only a distinct act of sorrow about it, but a distinct

purpose against it, and yet we feel sure, down in our minds, that we shall bring the same self-accusation to confession again. So the habit clings. All this is because we are lacking in confidence. If, from confidence in God and not in self, we believed we should never commit the sin again, probably we should not commit it again. We have fallen for want of faith in grace. Let us take another case. We desire to form certain habits of devotion; it may be, the habit of particular examination of conscience. Now no one can tell how burdensome this is, until he has tried it. It is a great restraint and a continual one. Some considerable amount of mortification is often necessary, in order to persevere in it under adverse circumstances. We give it up, as if the original taking of it upon ourselves had been an indiscretion. We give it up, and thereby forfeit untold graces, simply because we have not confidence in God. So it is with bodily mortifications. We abandon those we have begun, because we cannot believe we shall ever persevere in them. Or we exercise an infelicitous discretion, and shrink from committing ourselves to trifling austerities, whose grace would have been anything but trifling, simply because we are deficient in confidence in God. We thus alter our standing in heaven for ever. Indeed, as I said before, all generosity with God depends upon confidence in Him. It is the same with our outward works of mercy, when they are environed with difficulties. Saints made their way through impossibilities; we turn aside rather than attempt to brush a cobweb away. We turn out disappointingly under temptations and in interior trials, for the same reason. We do perhaps a tenth of the work for souls which we might do. All this happens because of our insufficient confidence in God.

O that we could inspire each other with more confidence in grace as a certain aid and an unfailing fountain! Happy

is he, who makes one other man trust God more than he did before ! He has done a great and influential work in creation. Happy we, if we know how to trust God as He should be trusted ! A child with his mother is full of innocent respectful liberties. He never doubts of gaining his end. He never anticipates a refusal, till it actually comes, no matter how often it has come before. He was refused yesterday, so he feels sure to-day. If refused, he persists with the persuasions of a not disobedient love, and argues with a playful smile. When he is definitively refused, he goes up to her, and kisses her, and runs away as happy with his mother's affectionate will, as if he had got what he wanted. So must we venture to be with our eternal Father.

*ON TAKING SCANDAL.*

To give scandal is a great fault, but to take scandal is a greater fault. It implies a greater amount of wrongness in ourselves, and it does a greater amount of mischief to others. Nothing gives scandal sooner than a quickness to take scandal. This is worth our consideration. For I find great numbers of moderately good people who think it fine to take scandal. They regard it as a sort of evidence of their own goodness, and of their delicacy of conscience; while in reality it is only a proof either of their inordinate conceit, or of their extreme stupidity. They are fortunate when this latter is the case; for then no one but inculpable nature is to blame. If, as some have said, a stupid man cannot be a saint, at least his stupidity can never make him into a sinner. Moreover the persons in question seem frequently to feel and act, as if their profession of piety involved some kind of official appointment to take scandal. It is their business to take scandal. It is their way of bearing testimony to God. It would show a blameable inertness in the spiritual life, if they did not take scandal. They think they suffer very much while they are taking scandal; whereas in truth they enjoy it amazingly. It is a pleasurable excitement, which delightfully varies the monotony of devotion. They do not in reality fall over their neighbour's fault, nor does it in itself hinder them in the way of holiness, nor do they love God less because of it, all which ought to be implied in taking scandal. But they trip



themselves up on purpose, and take care that it shall be opposite some fault of their neighbour, in order that they may call attention to the difference between him and themselves.

There are certainly many legitimate causes for taking scandal, but none more legitimate than the almost boastful facility of taking scandal, which characterises many so-called religious people. The fact is, that an immense proportion of us are Pharisees. For one pious man, who makes piety attractive, there are nine who make it repulsive. Or, in other words, only one out of ten among reputed spiritual persons is really spiritual. He, who during a long life has taken the most scandal, has done the most injury to God's glory, and has been himself a real and substantial stumbling-block in the way of many. He has been an endless fountain of odious disedification to the little ones of Christ. If such an one reads this, he will take scandal at me. Everything that he dislikes, everything which deviates from his own narrow view of things, is to him a scandal. It is the pharisaic way of expressing a difference. Men marvellously like to be popes; and the dullest of men, if only he has, as usual, an obstinacy proportioned to his dulness, can in most neighbourhoods carve out a tiny papacy for himself; and, if to his dulness he can add pomposity, he may reign gloriously, a little local ecumenical council in unintermitting session through all the four seasons of the year. Who has time enough, or heart enough, or hope enough, to try to persuade such men? They are not sufficiently interesting to us to be worth our persuading. Let us leave them alone with their glory and their happiness. Let us try to persuade ourselves. Do not we ourselves take scandal too often? Let us examine the matter and see.

Now here is a thing which I have often thought upon. Certainly no one can remember everything in the volu-

minous lives of the saints ; for it would take a lifetime to read them all. But I do not remember to have read of any saint who ever took scandal. If this is even approximately true, the question is decided at once. Big men, swollen with self-importance, who see the faults of others with eyes of lynxes, and criticise them with clever sarcasms, and delight in the pedantry of a judicial frame of mind, can only humorously apply to themselves the name of the little ones of Christ. Yet books tell us there are two kinds of scandal, the scandal of the little ones of Christ, and the scandal of Pharisees. It follows then that these men must be Pharisees. But I say that if this remark about the saints is even approximately true, it must give us a check, and make us very thoughtful, if we are earnest men, although we are not saints, and what belongs to saints is by no means safely applicable to us in all respects. Let us suppose it not to be strictly true. Let us suppose it only a rare thing for saints to take scandal. We can draw a sufficiently broad conclusion from this, to be very practical to ourselves. For we may infer, that it is a matter about which persons aiming at being spiritual are not sufficiently careful. Every time we take scandal we run a great risk of sinning, and a manifold risk as well as a great one. We run the risk of impairing God's glory, of dishonouring our Blessed Lord, of giving substantial scandal to others, of breaking the precept of charity ourselves, of highly culpable indiscretion, and, at the very least, of grieving the Holy Spirit in our own souls. Here is enough to make it worth our while to enquire.

Let us see, first of all, how much evil the habit of taking scandal implies. It implies a quiet pride, which is altogether unconscious how proud it is. Pride is the denial of the spiritual life. Spiritual pride means that we have no spiritual life, but the possession of that evil spirit instead of

it. Pride is hard enough to manage even when we are conscious of it; but a pride, which has no self-consciousness, is a very desperate thing. It often seems as if grace could only get at it through a fall into serious sin, which will awake its consciousness, and at the same moment turn it into shame. Now the habit of taking scandal indicates that worst sort of pride, a pride which believes itself to be humility. Anything like a habit of taking scandal implies also a fund of uncharitableness deep down in us, which grace and interior mortification have either not reached, or have failed to influence. If we pay attention to ourselves, we shall find that, contemporaneously with the scandal we have taken, there has been some wounded feeling or other in an excited state within us. When we are in good humour, we do not take scandal. It is an act which is not for the most part accompanied by kindness. A genuine gentle sorrow for the person offending is neither the first thought nor the predominant thought in our minds, when we take the offence. It is the offspring generally of an unkindly mood. Sometimes indeed it springs from moroseness, brought on by assuming a seriousness, which does not become us because it is not simple. We precipitate ourselves into recollection, and find that we have fallen over head and ears into sullenness. Neither can taking scandal be very frequent with us without its implying also a formed habit of judging others. With a really humble or a naturally genial person the instinct of judging others is overlaid and, as it were, weighted with other and better qualities. It has to exert itself and make an effort, before it can get to the surface and assert itself: whereas it lies on the surface, obvious, ready, prompt, and predominating, in a man who is given to taking scandal. Is it often allowable to judge our neighbour? Surely we know it to be the rarest thing possible. Yet we cannot take scandal without first forming

a judgment, secondly forming an unfavourable judgment, thirdly deliberately entertaining it as a motive power inclining us to do or to omit something, and fourthly doing all this for the most part in the subject-matter of piety, which in nine cases out of ten, our obvious ignorance withdraws from our jurisdiction.

It also indicates a general want of an interior spirit. The supernatural grace of an interior spirit, among its other effects, produces the same results as the natural gift of depth of character; and to this it joins the ingenious sweetness of charity. A thoughtless or a shallow man is more likely to take scandal than any other. He can conceive of nothing but what he sees upon the surface. He has but little self-knowledge, and hardly suspects the variety or complication of his own motives. Much less, then, is he likely to divine in a discerning way the hidden causes, the hidden excuses, the hidden temptations, which may lie, and always do lie, behind the actions of others. So it is in spiritual matters with a man who has not an interior spirit. There is not only a rashness, but also a coarseness and vulgarity, about his judgments of others. Sometimes he only sees superficially. This is if he is a stupid man. If he is a clever man, he sees deeper than the truth. His vulgarity is of the subtle kind. He puts things together, which had no real connection in the conduct of his neighbour. Base himself, he suspects baseness in others. If he saw a saint, he would think him either ambitious, opinionated, or hypocritical. He sees plots and conspiracies even in the most impulsive of characters. He cannot judge of character at all. He can only project his own possibilities of sin into others, and imagine that to be their character, which he feels, if grace were withdrawn from him, would be his own. He judges as a man judges whose reason is slightly unsettled. He is cunning rather than discerning.

To clever men charity is almost impossible, if they have not an interior spirit.

We shall also find, that, when we fall into the way of taking scandal, there is something wrong about our meditations. There are times when our meditations are inefficacious. With some men it is so nearly all through their lives. The fact is, that the habit of meditation will not by itself make us interior. When a man's spiritual life is reduced to the practice of daily meditation, we see that he soon loses all control over his tongue, his temper, and his wounded feelings. His morning's meditation is inadequate to the sweetening of his whole day. It is too feeble to detain the presence of God in his soul until evening. Like general intentions, it has theological possibilities, which are hardly ever practical realities. It is like a shrub planted in the clay; if we do not dig around it, and let in the air and moisture, it will not grow. Its growth is stunted and impeded. This is a perilous state of things, when our meditation is but an island in a day which is otherwise flooded with worldliness and comfort. For we must remember, that comfort is one of the worst kinds of worldliness, and is most at home in our own rooms, at a distance from the gay, noisy, and dissipated world. We are not far from some serious mishap, when mortification, and examination of conscience, have deserted our meditation, and left it to itself. A habit of taking scandal often reveals to us that we are in this state, or are fast tending to it.

It also poisons much else that is good, and desecrates holy things, almost making them positively unholy. It infuses somewhat of censoriousness into our intercessory prayer. It turns our spiritual reading into a silent preaching to others. It charms away the arrows of the preacher from ourselves, and aims them with a pleased skill at others whom we have in our mind's eye. It plays into the hands of whatever is

unkindly and unlovely in our natural dispositions; and it makes our very spirituality unspiritual by making it uncharitable. All this complicated evil it implies as already existing in us; and it fosters and increases it all for the future, while it is implying it in the present. It is plain therefore that it would be well for us to take scandal at our taking scandal, seeing what a degrading revelation it is to us of our own misery and meanness. We are aiming at a devout life. We have only just extricated ourselves from the swamps of mortal sin. We know something of the ways of grace. We have the models of the saints. We are more or less familiar with the teaching of spiritual writers. We are not obliged, either because of our ignorance or because of our weakness, to look to the conduct of others as the rule of our own. Hence, in our case, taking scandal is neither more nor less than judging, and we must treat the temptation to it, as we would treat any other temptation against charity, namely, check it, punish it, detest it, resolve against it, and accuse ourselves of it in confession. We must beware also of its artifices. For it has many tricks, and they are often successful. Masters, parents, and directors are quite familiar with a device of those under their care and control, and who criticise, suggestively at least, their government or direction; this trick consists in their accusing themselves of having taken scandal at the conduct of their superiors and directors. It is ingenious, but soon wears out. Directors learn early to stifle their own curiosity, and not allow their self-deluded critics to tell them what has scandalised them, as they cannot even listen to it without compromising their dignity and forfeiting their influence. In a word, we shall find it the truest and the safest conclusion to come to, that we must regard the temptation to take scandal as wholly and unmitigatedly evil, a temptation to which no quarter should be allowed, and to whose eloquent pleadings of delicacy of



conscience no audience should be given but that of calm contempt.

Now that we have considered the existing evil which a readiness to take scandal implies in us, we may consider the way in which it hinders us in the attainment of perfection. It hinders us in the acquisition of self-knowledge. Watchfulness over ourselves is nothing short of an actual mortification. We eagerly lay hold of the slightest excuse for turning our attention away from ourselves, and the conduct of others is the readiest object to which we turn. No one is so blind to his own faults as a man who has the habit of detecting the faults of others. It also causes us to stand in our own light. We ourselves actually intercept the sunshine which would fall on our own souls. A man who is apt to take scandal is never a blithe or a genial man. He has never a clear light round about him. He is not made for happiness; and was ever a melancholy man made into a saint? A downcast man is raw material which can only be manufactured into a very ordinary Christian. Moreover, if we have any sort of earnestness about us, our taking scandal must at last become a source of scruples to us. If it is not quite the same thing as censoriousness, who shall draw the line between them? We know very well that it is not at our best times that we take scandal, and it must dawn upon us by degrees that it is so often contemporary with a state of spiritual malady, that the coincidence can hardly be accidental. At the same time the act is so intrinsically ungenerous in itself, that it tends to destroy all generous impulses in ourselves. No one can be generous with God, who has not a great, broad love of his neighbour.

Furthermore, it destroys our influence with others. We irritate where we ought to enliven. To be suspected of want of sympathy is to be disabled as an apostle. He who is critical will necessarily be unpersuasive. Even in literature,

what department of it is less persuasive, and thus less influential, than that of criticism? Men are amused by it, but they do not form their judgments on it. There are few things in the literary world more striking than the little weight of criticism compared with the amount and the ability of it. We like to find fault ourselves; but we are never attracted to another man who finds fault. It is the last refuge of our good humour that we like to have a monopoly of censure. Then, again, this habit entangles us in a hundred self-raised difficulties about fraternal correction, that rock of narrow souls; for a man's presumption is mostly in proportion to his narrowness. Men awake sometimes, and find that they have almost unconsciously worked themselves into a false position. This is a terrible affair in spirituality. It is harder to work ourselves right from a false position than to recover our balance after a sin. Yet the supposed obligation of fraternal correction is always enticing us into false positions. It also calls our attention off from God, and fixes them with a sort of diseased earnestness upon earthly miseries and pusillanimities. It is bad enough to look off from God by looking too much on ourselves; but to look off from God in order to look upon our neighbours is a greater evil still. It deranges the whole interior world of thought, upon which the exercise of charity so much depends. It hinders us in acquiring the government of the tongue. It prevents our succeeding in good works where zealous and free co-operation with others is needed. It is the cloak, which jealousy is for ever assuming, and calling it by the name of caution. Finally, we think all these things virtues, while they are in reality vices of the most unamiable description.

I do not think I have exaggerated the evil of this quickness to take scandal. I confess it is a fault which vexes me more than many others, and for many reasons. Its victims are good men, men full of promise, and whose souls

have been the theatres of no inconsiderable operations of grace. It seizes them for the most part just at the time when higher attainments seem opening to them. Its peculiarity is, that it is incompatible with the higher graces of the spiritual life, that it defiles that which was now almost cleansed, and vulgarises that which was on the point of establishing its title of nobility. When we consider how many are called to perfection, and how few are perfect, may we not almost say that we do well to be angry with that evil, which so opportunely and so effectually mars the work of grace?

In what does perfection consist? In a childlike, short-sighted charity which believes all things; in a grand supernatural conviction that every one is better than ourselves; in estimating far too low the amount of evil in the world; in looking far too exclusively on what is good; in the ingenuity of kind constructions; in an inattention, hardly intelligible, to the faults of others; in a graceful perversity of incredulousness about scandals, which sometimes in the saints runs close upon being a scandal of itself. This is perfection, this is the temper and genius of saints and saint-like men. It is a life of desire, oblivious of earthly things. It is a radiant energetic faith, that man's slowness and coldness will not interfere with the success of God's glory. Yet all the while it is instinctively fighting, by prayer and reparation, against evils, which it will not allow itself consciously to believe. No shadow of moroseness ever falls over the bright mind of a saint. It is not possible that it should do so. Finally, perfection has the gift of entering into the universal spirit of God, who is worshipped in so many different ways, and is content. Now is not all this just the very opposite of the temper and spirit of a man who is apt to take scandal? The difference is so plain, that it is needless to comment on it. He is happy who on his dying

bed can say, No one has ever given me scandal in my life ! He has either not seen his neighbour's faults, or when he saw them, the sight had to reach him through so much sunshine of his own, that they did not strike him so much as faults to blame, but rather as reasons for a deeper and a tenderer love.

*ON A TASTE FOR READING*

CONSIDERED AS A HELP IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

A MAN has tried for some time to avoid sin, and to keep close to God. He has taken pleasure in prayer, in religious services, and above all in the Blessed Sacrament. Peace is consciously stealing over a life, which was perhaps fretful and agitated before. New self-knowledge comes in upon him largely, yet not so as to confuse or overwhelm him. He sees heights in the practice of virtue, which had been hidden in the clouds before, and he is not discouraged. He hopes to climb them; nay, he has a modest certainty that he shall one day stand upon those heights. He is realising every day more and more that God loves him, and with the increase of that consciousness all other heavenly things increase within him. But now another trouble is becoming visible in his soul. It is no bigger than a point, less than the hand which the prophet saw from Carmel. It is stealing up, like morning over the sea, without a sound, with a level grey brightness over the waters, shyly as if it was not sure of a welcome, yet gradually as if it did not wish to take us by surprise. It has come to the man to feel, that there is another sort of closeness to God, different from any he has thought of before. Another form of goodness is taking shape before his eyes. A tranquil dissatisfaction is mastering him. It will soon grow into a restlessness, but a restlessness which lies on a deeply hidden peace. He looks

up to heaven to God, but lo! a hand is put out from the depths of his own soul, and is fain to draw him gently down there. A voice without words seems to say to him, Not up in the blue sky, or beyond it, but down here! The Holy Ghost has given him the craving for an inward life, a new vocation, a vocation to a closer union with God, and a union of another sort, a finding of God within. Happy the souls who are thus touched! Now, if they will but correspond! If they can but light on one who shall guide them well!

Under this divine pressure the man seeks his spiritual father. He is athirst for God, and he goes to the shepherd to show him the springs up amongst the hills. Woe to the shepherd, if he cannot show them, from not knowing himself where they are! The inquirer naturally lays before his chosen guide all that has passed within him, and is passing within him still. He tells him of the faults of his past life, and as far as he can judge of himself, the faulty tendencies of his natural character. He and his guide, however, are in very different states of mind. He is engrossed with the delight of his present feelings. He is yet thrilling under the divine touch. But his guide sees onward, far onward, beyond that first range of beautiful mountains. He sees the portals of a wilderness, and through them the wastes of pale glistening sand. Dangers and delusions, faintings and uncertainties, strange trials and unwonted temptations, these are the images of the future which rise to the eye of the guide. Yet he is full of sympathy. He looks with tender respect on the man whose soul God has touched. The grandest of all the signs of predestination is shining majestically round him, in this vocation to the mystical apostolate of the inward life. He could almost kneel to one on whom God's finger has so lately pressed, nay, is perhaps pressing still; only that these touches are very swift and transitory,



even when their consequences are permanent and lifelong. Nevertheless he is filled also with an affectionate anxiety, because of the numerous requirements he must make upon his disciple. He must require generosity ; that is the first of indispensable things. He must exact humility, though just now he cares less for deficiencies there than in generosity. But at all events he must have such material humility as amounts to docility. The growing knowledge of God will bring the rest.

These are great requirements ; yet they are only two out of many. What can he dispense with, so as neither to frighten nor to burden the beginner ? He need not be much afraid of frightening ; for men are unconsciously brave, in whom a recent touch of God is still throbbing. But he may easily burden him overmuch, and so may even suffocate grace in the soul. Generosity and humility are very great things, but so great, that at least he must with them have one lesser thing, one little thing, along with them, an engine small enough to be practicable, an implement capable of working on small scales, a tool not too big to be well grasped and held tight without distracting the whole man by the mere effort of handling it. He chooses one, which his disciple hardly expected, nay, at present cannot bring himself to believe in,—a taste for reading. With all the varied future as well as imminent difficulties of his dear disciple before him, the master seems exaggeratedly anxious that he should already have, or forthwith acquire, a taste for reading. To all he will say it is important, even inside the walls of a cloister, but to souls in the world, who have neither rule, cloister, nor superior, he will most dogmatically assert this taste for reading, to be, as a general rule, indispensable to perfection, and that without it he cannot pretend to undertake the work now entrusted to him.

Beginners must take many things on faith. Long before

they are perfect they will have learned that they must take all things on faith; such depths will have opened upon them as to show inscrutable difficulties everywhere. The habit of believing will have become stronger than the habit of knowing. Men who have to learn, as all spiritual men have, that obscurity is the clearest and purest kind of light, have also other strange things to learn, and are too much engrossed to have time to be astonished. Beginners therefore must take for granted, that their master knows what he is about, when he lays such stress upon a taste for reading. Perhaps the monks of St. Hugh of Lincoln had to take it on faith, when their saintly abbot made so much of it. His biographer tells us that it was one of his chief cares that all his religious should be provided with plenty of devout books, and books were scarce in those days. St. Hugh was always impressing upon them the duty of reading. He even went so far as to tell them that their spiritual books were "their arms in time of war, their occupation in time of peace, their support in time of trial, and their remedy in time of sickness." St. Ignatius went quite along with St. Hugh in this matter. However it is not my object at present to accumulate authorities to prove the immense importance of reading in the spiritual life. I want rather to explain the stress laid upon it by ascetical masters, and to make it less strange to those who think it strange. Perhaps they will thus allow themselves to be persuaded to a more generous docility in the matter.

Other things being equal, a person beginning the spiritual life with a taste for reading has a much greater chance both of advancing and of persevering, than one who is destitute of such a taste. Experience shows that it is really almost equal to a grace. The hardest thing in the world is to think, that is, to think real thought. Goethe said that, if men wanted to think, they must avoid "thinking about think-

ing." This is a fatal process, a quagmire which has sucked up generations of unfortunate young men, and is capable of absorbing as many generations more. The best test of a system of education is the power of thinking which it engenders in its men. If we are at all observant, we must have been struck with this feature in the conversation of self-educated men, that, while it is very often clever, it is hardly ever characterised by real thought. The power of thinking is an immense help in the spiritual life. But it belongs to the few, and is mostly the result of an excellent education, which is, in this matter as in all others, the grand natural support of the life of the Church. Next to the power of thinking we may reckon the power of reading, or, to be less exacting, the taste for reading, which in spiritual matters is practically the same thing with the multitude of men, as the most important of all the personal non-supernatural qualifications for an inward life. As the power of thinking is the highest test of a system of education, so the second test by which it should be tried is its successful creation of a taste for reading. But by all persons a taste for reading is positively attainable, while the power of thinking is not so. Men, who have been loosely and disjointedly educated, or educated without the cultivation of their imaginations, will have all the more difficulty in acquiring this taste for reading. Still the difficulties are not very formidable. The process is little more than one of time. There are harder things to be done along the road to perfection, and success more than repays the effort. Any how, whether we have the taste for reading already, or whether we have to acquire it, we may be sure that he who begins a devout life without it, may consider the ordinary difficulties of such a life multiplied in his case at least by ten. I will now make some observations with a view of showing you that this is not an exaggeration.

In the first place, the mere knowledge gained by reading spiritual books, even books which are very indirectly spiritual, is of incalculable importance. I am not speaking of erudition. I am aware that there is a consent among the great ascetics of the seventeenth century, that learned persons are nearly the most difficult to lead to perfection, both because the absorption of learning engrosses their interest and interferes with habits of contemplation, and also because the process of study withers the freshness of the mind for prayer, and dries the affections as if an east wind had passed over them. But knowledge and learning are two different ideas. It is not easy to think out for ourselves even very obvious things. Reading suggests them to us. It increases the light round about us, and also the light within us. We gain time by appropriating through books the experience of others. We learn methods which shorten roads. We multiply our motives of action, and we infuse new vigour into old motives by understanding them better. It is instructive to observe, that, when God is pleased to raise ignorant and illiterate persons to a high state of perfection, He infuses into them supernatural science, making them very frequently even accomplished theologians and profound expositors of Scripture; as if knowledge must lie in the spiritual soul either as a cause or an effect of holiness, or more probably as both. It is the common rule, that an ill-instructed person can never attain any considerable heights in devotion. He must have, for the most part, a knowledge of spiritual things, and even some knowledge of theology.

In the next place, we must take into account the direct assistance in our combat, which we derive from reading books about God, and the soul, and the virtues or the lives of the saints. They stir up our affections to God as we read. They elicit by a gentle compulsion, continued acts of love, or hope, or faith, or desire, or contrition.

They are like inspirations to us. Silent divine voices leap into our souls from off the page. Spiritual reading is itself an essential exercise. It is a special and peculiar form of prayer, the management of which is one of the important features of our spiritual day. Historically speaking, the reading of the lives of the saints alone has been a most energetic power of holiness in the Church for long ages.\* It will almost surprise us if we make an effort to remember how much we ourselves owe, in our little efforts after spirituality, to the study of the lives of the saints.

So far we have considered spiritual reading as directly an intrinsic portion of a devout life, one of its actual and almost indispensable exercises; and we have considered this very briefly, inasmuch as it deserves to be handled separately, both because there is so much to be said upon it, and because what might be said is of such great importance.† What we have now to bring forward, although it primarily concerns spiritual reading, applies also to reading which need be only indirectly spiritual. Every one must have experienced the good effects of religious reading as connected with prayer. Prayer is the grand difficulty of most souls.

\* For illustrations of the effects of reading the lives of the saints, and also for the right method of reading them, see the Author's Essay on Canonisation, pp. 9, et seqq., and his Essay on the Characteristics of the Saints, pp. 17, et seqq.

† Although I am not treating here of the right method of managing our spiritual reading, I cannot resist quoting for the reader's benefit a passage from Dacrianus, which deserves to be written in letters of gold. *Noli eos imitari, qui nullum legendi ordinem servant; sed quod forte occurrerit, quodque casu reppererint, legere gaudent: quibus nihil sapit, nisi quod novum est, et inauditum. Consueta enim, et vetera omnia, quantumlibet utilia, fastidiunt. Tanta instabilitas procul a te sit: ipsa enim non promovet, sed dispergit spiritum; et periculose laborat, qui hoc morbo vitiatum est.* Yet how many are there whose spiritual reading is a luxury, rather than a spiritual exercise! *Dacrianus ap Nigronium. p. 199. in tractatu quinto. De lectione libr. spiritual.*

Solve that difficulty, and other difficulties are solved with it. Now reading feeds and furnishes prayer. It supplies matter. It plants the wilderness. It irrigates what it has planted. The old masters call it oil for the lamp of prayer. How often do men, not beginners only, but men who are far from their beginnings now, complain that they do not know what to think about at meditation, or what to say to God. It is not too much to affirm, that regular and rightly-practised spiritual reading obviates at least half the difficulties of meditation. It is a sad thing to have been twenty years serving God, and to be still fighting with our morning meditation; although it is a comfort to think that St. Teresa was engaged in those hostilities for seventeen years.

Reading is also of no inconsiderable service simply as an occupation of time. The use of time is one of the chief difficulties of the spiritual life. If we may distinguish the one from the other, we should be less frightened of St. Teresa's vow, Always to do what was most perfect, than of St. Alphonso's, Never to waste a moment of time; and the most impressive thing in those wonderful eighty-eight years of St. Andrew Avellino is his never having let a moment glide by unperceived and unoccupied. It tries our faith to think of it. Now we cannot always keep our minds fixed on God, I mean we who are not saints. We may doubt it of the saints, gravely doubt it, but, having no experience of sainthood, we cannot dogmatise about it. Yet, when the effort to do so would be too much for us, there are in most of our days gaps of time which would be filled up with inutilities. Inutilities would be the most innocent filling up of them, yet how spirit-wasting also! Then reading, not our regular spiritual reading, which is a more serious and direct intercourse with God, but conscientiously chosen reading, even of a secular sort, comes in, and not



only saves us from evil by being harmless, but does us a positive good in itself.

Moreover it takes possession of the mind, of which the evil one is always on the watch to take possession. It occupies it. It garrisons it. It peoples it with thoughts which are directly or indirectly of God. Now in these days there are two contagious influences in the atmosphere around us, which are most deleterious to the spiritual life. They are the multiplicity of interests, and the rapidity of objects. It is sad to see the success with which these two things thrust God out of our minds, perpetually edging a little more forward, and a little more, and a little more. The mere occupation of our minds, therefore, with religious objects, has become of serious importance in devotion, especially to those who are living in the world, and so are forced to hear its roar, and to turn giddy at the sight of its portentously swift whirling and revolving, as if it were a machine of God got loose from His control. I need not dwell on this, but it would not be easy to make too much of it. For, what has taken possession of the current of our thoughts has taken possession of our whole selves. A taste for reading is therefore especially necessary for these times, because of their perils and their peculiarities.

It is by this occupation of our thoughts, that reading hinders castlebuilding, which is an inward disease wholly incompatible with devotion. Perhaps it is speaking too broadly to say, that reading hinders it altogether, but at least it makes it much less likely, and confines it within much narrower bounds. In temptations also, it is a two-fold help, both negative and positive. Negative, because all occupation involves the non-existence of a great many temptations; and positive, because it furnishes an actual distraction while we are under temptations, as well as gives us light in our warfare with them, and a heating of the

heart which prevents our being chilled by their icy touch. It also delivers us from listlessness, which is a dangerous enemy of devotion, especially to those who live in the world, and have not the help of an always pressing rule and the soft uninterrupted pulsations of community acts. Towards afternoon a person who has nothing to do drifts rapidly away from God. To sit down in a chair without an object is to jump into a thicket of temptations. A vacant hour is always the devil's hour. When time hangs heavy, the wings of the spirit flap painfully and slow. Then it is that a book is a strong tower, nay, a very church, with angels lurking among the leaves, as if they were so many niches.

But from our privacy let us pass to society. Conversation! what a stormy sea is that for a spiritual man to navigate! Possibilities of sin everywhere, rapid flow of indeliberate words, galloping of images through the mind, indistinct in the dust they raise, impossibility of adequate vigilance because of impossibility of ubiquity, unsatisfactory helplessness in the effort to preserve general purity of intention,—tongues whetting tongues, brain heating brain, faces kindling faces, rapidity at last becoming terrific, and with rapidity unguarded oblivion,—while truth, and justice, and charity, and reverence, and modesty and kindness are standing round, mute listeners, shy, jealous, suspicious, frightened, almost fanciful, wincing visibly now and then,—and the great fact that we are talking in God, with His immensity for our room, gradually growing less and less distinguishable! Were it not so hard to be one of the silent saints, even commonly good people would gradually steal into Carthusian deserts. But reading helps to make conversation harmless, by making it less petty, and less censorious. Our books are our neighbour's allies, by making it less necessary for us to discuss him. It is very hard

for a person, who does not like reading, to talk without sinning. As a help to the government of the tongue, therefore, that government without which, as St. James tells us, a man's whole religion is vain, a taste for reading is invaluable.

It also makes us and our piety more attractive to those around us. It enables us to adorn our Christian profession much more in the sight of others. Ignorance is repulsive, but I doubt if it is so repulsive as that half-ignorant narrowness of mind, which characterises persons who do not read. The world is full of objections to devotion; and its want of geniality, of sympathy with men and things, is one of the chief objections to it. We may be quite sure that men have on the whole preached the Gospel in their conversation more when they spoke indirectly on religion, than when they spoke directly on it. Common interests are a bond. We are better missionaries in daily society, if we have a taste for reading; and this of course does not mean spiritual reading on the one hand, nor on the other that light reading which dissipates our spirit, sullies our faith, and makes our conversation puerile or frothy. Above all, a taste for reading is necessary for Christian parents. It is evil for those children who are more educated by tutors and governesses than by their own parents. A mother, who is little with her children, is but half a mother; and how dull, and foolish, and uninteresting, and uninfluential must children grow up, if, as their minds expand, they find the conversation of their parents, as the conversation of unreading persons must be, empty, shallow, gossiping, vapid, and more childish than the children's talk among themselves! It is this which explains what we so often observe, that a taste for reading, or the absence of it, is hereditary. Furthermore, still speaking of society, a taste for reading often hinders our taking the wrong side in practical questions,

which are mooted in the world, but tell upon the Church. It does this, either by the information it has enabled us to obtain on the subject itself, or by making our instincts accurate and sensitive through our familiarity with right principles, and with the subjects kindred to the one under discussion. Look how many little-minded, narrow-sighted good people get on a wrong tack about the Church, and the Pope, and public affairs, especially in a non-catholic country, simply because, having no taste for reading, they are fractions of men rather than men.

Now to go back to ourselves again, and our own self improvement. Do we not all perceive in ourselves a tendency to become vulgar, to be interested with petty interests, to be recreated by foolish recreations, to be allured by ignoble pursuits? It seems as if, when the gay liberty and sweet clever simplicity of childhood evaporated, they left some dregs of sheer unmitigated puerility behind them, which made a shallow in the soul upon which we were ever and anon stranding. Very high spirituality sets us far above all this. But which of us is dwelling in those regions? Meanwhile a taste for reading obviously does the same work for us in another way, and naturally with inferior success, yet with a success complete in its kind and degree. It raises us. It calls out our manhood. It makes us grave. It infuses an element of greatness into everything about us. The same taste also helps us with our temper. It aids us in the supernatural work of gaining inward peace. When we are fretted, and are too feeble to lay hold of higher things, we have always a self-tranquillising process at hand in reading. But who is not fretted well-nigh daily, and well-nigh daily forfeiting graces by his fretfulness! When I said before, that a taste for reading was especially necessary for these times, I said also that it was especially necessary for those leading devout lives in the world;

for they are the souls who most want peace, and least find it.

I am afraid of making you suspect me, by the multiplicity of my reasons. Nevertheless you must bear patiently with some more, which will not occupy us long. The spiritual life is always more or less a work in the dark ; but it is a darkness in which we see. Nevertheless when we can see what we are doing, and whither we are going, what our work is, and how God would have us to do it, we work more securely, and advance more rapidly. Even when we see our end before us, we have often to arrest ourselves in life, and make a deliberate election of the means best calculated to bring us to our end ; and still more often have we to decide upon the character of some apparent means, which may in reality be a temptation or a distraction, either to turn us aside from the right road, or at least to hinder us from concentrating our efforts upon our single ascertained end. In all these cases we derive the greatest assistance from reading. Indeed it is astonishing how pertinent all our reading seems to become, when we are in difficulties. It is as if the Holy Ghost, rather than ourselves, had chosen what we should read ; and it is He most assuredly who gives it now such a special unction and special message to our souls in their present straits.

As a taste for reading assists us by illuminating our own work, so does it enlarge our charity in judging of the work of others. The more we know, the less narrow are our minds. Our sphere of vision is increased. Our horizon is wider. We appreciate the manifold varieties of grace and of vocations. We see how God's glory finds its account in almost infinite diversity, and how holiness can be at home in opposites, nay, how what is wrong in this man is acceptable, perhaps heroic, in that other man. Hence we free ourselves from little jealousies, from uncharitable doubts, from un-

worthy suspicions, from unsympathetic cautions, from ungenerous delays, from narrow criticisms, from conceited pedantries, from shallow pomposities, about others and their good works, things which are the especial diseases of little great men and little good men, and which may be said to frustrate one-third, if not more, of all the good works which are attempted in the Church. Goodness, which is not greatness also, is a sad misfortune. While it saves its own soul, it will not let others save theirs. Especially does it contrive, in proportion to its influence, to put a spoke in the wheel of all progress, and has almost a talent for interfering with efforts for the salvation of souls. Now, if reading did no more than abate the virulence of any one of these eight diseases of narrow goodness, mentioned above, would it not be a huge work ! For we are all of us little at times, even when we are not habitually little. Self-love makes us jealous, and jealousy makes us little. But how much more, as experience teaches us, does a taste for reading do, than merely abate the virulence of these things ! How many a narrow mind has it not made broad ! How many close, stifling, unwindowed hearts has it not filled with mountain air and sunshine, and widened them to noble spacious halls, so making room for God, where He had no room before !

It also heightens our whole spiritual standing by making us more free from human respect. When we have a taste for reading, and reading approved religious books, we acquire the sense of standing under the eye and at the judgment-seat of great and holy minds. Their judgments give the law to ours. They introduce us into another world, where right measures and true standards prevail, and where injustice and falsehood are righted in the mind as they will be righted in fact at the general doom. Hence the judgments of that little inefficient circle immediately round ourselves, which we surname the world, are less important, less all-in-all in



our eyes, than they used to be. We have got accustomed to higher things, to wider prospects, to greater worlds. He who does not suffer from the tyranny of human respect, will hardly appreciate the force of this reason: but in what fortunate clime, or even in what anchoret's cell, is that blissful man to be found?

Last of all, we must not forget St. Hugh's reason for making much of good books that they make illness and sorrow more endurable. Doubtless what has surprised us in all our illnesses is that they have sanctified us so little. Pain has done so much less for us, than by all accounts it should have done. Our experience of the matter has not been the same as the experience of the saints. It is not so much that we have been less patient, as that we have been more animal. We have been occupied with the physical part of our sufferings. All our energies have been absorbed in the effort of endurance. Even sorrow we make too physical. Moreover, though others should not ask too much of us, neither should we unwisely overtax ourselves, yet there is no doubt we allow both sorrow and sickness to make us more idle than they need do. We waste time in suffering, when moments, always precious, are more precious than at any other time of life. Now in the matter of patience, in the matter of inwardly sanctifying our sufferings, and in the matter of needless indolence, we shall find a taste for reading of great service to us both in sickness and sorrow.

“But all these are very low and merely natural reasons!” True; but are we fit for higher things yet? Have we any dispensation from the earlier stages of this grand journey? Surely, if we rightly estimate ourselves, we may feel that we are too low for the lowest thing that is good; but we cannot feel that we are too high for anything. Here then are about twenty reasons why a spiritual guide is so

anxious to know whether one, who is just putting himself under direction, has a taste for reading. He knows by experience that this taste will practically do the work of higher graces, before we have yet reached, in the common course of things, the region where those higher graces dwell.

*THE MONOTONY OF PIETY.*

To ourselves it is always good to make the best of a bad case ; but in persuading others it is good to admit the worst in that which is the subject of their complaints. Now most men in most stages of the spiritual life complain that piety is monotonous. An interior life is dull, tame, uninteresting, uniform, wearisome, and sickly. It would be easy to answer, as many do answer, that to meditate on the magnificences of God can hardly be dull ; to fight for our own lives with the superior intellect and huge power of a fallen seraph can hardly be tame, whatever else it may be ; to be all day receiving new actual graces, realising new increments of sanctifying grace, listening to numerous and wonderfully diversified inspirations of the Holy Spirit, can hardly be uninteresting ; to be changing in grace, and love, and knowledge nearly every hour cannot strictly be called uniform ; and to be fighting God's battle even with the most importunate and dishonouring temptations cannot truly be a sickly thing, even though it may be fatiguing. Indeed from an intellectual point of view it would not be easy to find anything in the world so thoroughly refreshing, so actively full of changeful vitality, or so briskly interesting, as a spiritual life. It is the healthiest, manliest, completest, divinest thing on earth. Resolve it into its elements of prayer, of light, of love, of heavenly communications, and of the highest operations of a human will, and what more noble, more free, more wide, more magnificent ? Look at

its darker side, failures, temptations, fallings short, inward trials, diabolical intrusions, and what more interesting? At the least interesting, at the least not monotonous, if it be nothing else. This is an answer, common enough, and true in its way, yet eminently unsatisfactory, because it is not genuine. It wants the persuading charm of truthfulness, although it is true: and for this reason, that it is only true to us when we do not feel piety monotonous, while it is untrue to us when the monotony is sensible. It remains speculatively true, while it is practically false. In ascetics, as well as in theology, we need something more than logic in order to discover truth, something indeed above logic. Unless we can embrace in our minds, and feel not to be contradictions, opposite truths which are not only seeming contradictions, but *to us* effectually irreconcilable, we can never hold the truth. We must sacrifice it to the rigour of an unfruitful consistency. Whoever read and compared half a dozen theologians on Grace, and did not see this? Yet when these theologians came to preach sermons or write spiritual books for the people, they all taught alike; they were all at their ease; they all turned their faces one way, to make people acknowledge that salvation was wholly of grace; then they all calmly turned their faces the other way, and reproached and insisted as if free-will could do it all; and they found the teaching of incompatibles as easy as it was comfortable when it concerned divine things. So is it in conflicting questions in the spiritual life. The experience of kindly direction will do for our ascetical theories, what the patient and observant confessional does for our theology.

So then I give up this answer about the monotony of piety. I am not going to administer to you a dignified reproof for calling the service of God and the salvation of your souls a tame and uninteresting work. I admit it. I

admit it to be my own experience. Indeed I believe the admission will help us to the better sight of some truths, which, although they will not make piety less monotonous, will teach us what to do with our monotony, and how to make the most of it. I will freely confess that I know nothing in the world, to which I can compare for monotony the occasional drag of a pious life, except either the being detained at a country inn during a hopelessly wet day, or driving a tired horse in a gig for a long stage which is on the collar the whole way. Not very dignified comparisons! No—but where shall we find any dignity about the monotonous? We are out of the atmosphere of dignity when we are in the region of monotony.

Let us get a clear idea of monotony. It is something more than the being uninteresting, something more than the being uniform, something more than honest, downright weariness. We may get tired of looking at lightning. It is about the last sight in the world to get tired of. Still we may tire of it. Yet no one could call lightning monotonous. Rahel Varnhagen used to say, “Heavenly men *love* lightning.” An interesting thing may become monotonous by our becoming callous to its excitement. Yet it need not thereby cease to be interesting. Even a change may become monotonous to us, from its following uniform laws in a lifeless and pedantic way. Novelties may be monotonies even while they are still novelties, from being forcedly new, or obviously new as treats to us and distractions to us, having the old expressions of countenance under their masks, and the old odour about their flowers. This is especially true of novelties in devotion. They are simply old friends come back on the stage with their jackets turned inside out, and their hats cocked on the other side. Our spiritual nurses coax us to receive them as novelties, and pretend to go into ecstasies with their newness. Alas! we

are too old for those dear deceits, yet not old enough to know that life is too short to let it be worth our while to be indignant with impostures.

In fact monotony is a very unmonotonous thing. Yet this is true of all the varieties of monotony, that they keep down among the littlenesses of our nature, and betray us into all manner of protean unworthiness. There are monotones which irritate, like the monotony of a man who is always joking and punning. All forms of stupidity are irritating, but this perhaps most of all. Some monotones are placid, and minister to our indolence, like the plashing of a fountain. Most men have one monotony or other which never tires them. To me the sound of the wind blowing and wailing is always new music and almost articulate speech. The fluent conversation of a light-hearted grammatical man is a delightful monotony, quite apart from the sense which there may or may not be in his talk. Sense is not requisite, only fluency and grammar. Some monotones are almost universally depressing, as the monotony of a solemn manner, which to the male sex is almost without exception intolerable, yet is attractive and influential with many women, perhaps as indicating something foreign to their nature ; for a solemn woman is surely not common, and, if anybody has seen one, he has most probably found that she was not a favourite. Then there are monotones which rest us, as, in certain moods at least, the sight of the wilderness of the sea. But I have said enough about monotones. I want to force a picture of it into your mind, rather than to furnish you with a definition, else I might have dismissed the whole matter by giving you the old one, "Want of variety in cadence;" for it is just this which annoys us in life, when our life is for ever repeating the same cadences, like a preacher who preaches as if he were doing a lection in choir. Alas! and is not this true of



almost all lives in these smooth days, that they are all on one note?

We will start then with the admission that piety is almost unpardonably monotonous, and that we may the more pardonably complain of this, first of all, because at the outset it distinctly promised to be otherwise, and secondly because really monotony is not a quiet suffering, like a degree too much of heat on a summer day, but it is a positive strain upon us. It is an active annoyance, not a merely passive one. Now then, without the slightest hope of changing matters, indeed without the least effort to do so, and without any purpose, let alone expectation, of finding a remedy, we plunge into the matter in order to investigate it, believing that something practical will come of the investigation, without exactly knowing or caring how much or what. We shall at least pass through some country, and see something; and a man is not worth much who is not a trifle the better, deeper, and truer man for everything he sees. I have a presentiment, that with a little adroitness we can make capital of our monotony.

Why is piety so monotonous? "Really," some of you may say, "now that you force me to think of it steadily, I do not perceive that it is so monotonous." Fortunate soul! then read no further. You will perhaps find suitable matter for you in other Conferences, if rather you are not happily above the need of any Conferences. The rest of us will work out this problem of our monotony, and try to forget it for a while by the very working of it. Why is piety so monotonous? Because it lies in so small a compass, because there are only Ten Commandments, because it is all fear, because it is all love. These are reasons, brief enough, and with nothing in them to be complained of. Nevertheless piety would not be less monotonous, if we had more than Ten Commandments to keep, or if the Counsels were innumerable.

We have little need to complain of piety lying in such a small compass ; for that narrow compass is wider than we can conveniently stretch ourselves to fill. But the answers are too summary, altogether too narrow for the question. We must answer more at length, more in detail.

The spiritual life is the progress of the finite creature towards union with the Infinite. In all its stages the process of being conformed to God is going on in the soul. Nothing is indifferent. Every moment of time may be made to bear the burden of something which is eternal. Each separate action, no matter how trivial, is capable of holding a supernatural immensity. The grace, which enables us to do supernatural things, is coming to us constantly in ways which are imperceptible except to the greatest vigilance, and operating in us with such fineness and delicacy as require a heavenly discernment, in order that we may perceive them, and co-operate with them. On the other hand, the unworthiness of our nature is almost unbounded, and its manifold unfitness for such a divine union is disabling us at every turn. So that we have to live down among our own motives, and consort with all the creeping and crawling things of self-love, in order to be provided against a surprise. Moreover nature to the last draws one way, and grace from the first draws another. Thus the three leading characteristics of the spiritual life must always be effort, detail, and slowness, all three things monotonous, and the sustained combination of the three almost an insufferable monotony.

When we advance in self-knowledge, and by grace have obtained a tolerable command over those greater passions, whose tyranny has in it something of a seeming dignity, and even the shame of which is felt not to be degrading, we come to the meanness of our nature and character. Here the work becomes slower, at the very moment that it has grown

less endurable. The details also multiply, and fresh vigour has to be infused into efforts which have no sort of external stimulus to cheer them on, and very often hardly a place on which to rest their lever. The drag of the spiritual life is not so much felt by a man when he is getting out of his sins, and quelling the revolts of his greater passions, as it is when he comes to his ungenerosities, his little untruthfulnesses, his ingrained hypocrisies, his mean jealousies, his degrading spites, his incredible conceits, his causeless dislikes, the undignified vagaries of his wounded feelings, his secret slavery of human respect, and all the crookedness of his self-love. It is here that the monotony begins. All the phases of the work only deepen its monotony.

Dirty work, such as digging and delving in a swamp, is well known to be more wearisome than other work, even when it is not more tiring in itself. It is wearisome because it is dirty; and the discomfort of it is a not inapt representation of the work of the spiritual life. It is a work also at which we must always labour stooping, and the posture adds to the monotony. It is an extremely solitary toil. We cannot work at our souls in gangs. We must labour in secret. Even the intelligence and sympathy of our directors cannot reach into the innermost secrets of our secrecy. Thus there is nothing to beguile the time. It is sheer work, unparticipated, uncommunicated, unrelieved. Furthermore, our efforts are attended with extremely little success, and most even of that little is imperceptible to ourselves, or imperceptible at the time. It is not a work which can be put in detail under any external obedience. It can only be generally under obedience. The minutest regulations of a director, which, because of their very minuteness, are as often a snare to souls as a help to them, are only a general obedience, compared with the minute intricacy of the ever-shifting operations within. Then, again, a work soon

becomes wearisome when it is not under obedience, wearisome with a weariness quite different from that produced by the uniform pressure of obedience, and harder far to bear. Moreover, the perpetual shifting of the operations of the interior life is itself a fountain of monotony ; for there is no monotony so flat as the monotony of endlessly fluctuating change.

To be always beginning is an irritating as well as an uninteresting thing. Yet this also is an invariable characteristic of the spiritual life. It is a work which almost any change of outward position, so morally feeble are we, actually interrupts. Then there is a beginning again at the same place with the same tools and under the old difficulties. It is like the perpetual falling in of a tunnel in unmanageable loose soil. Moreover it is a work which we only very imperfectly understand ; and understanding is light, and light is cheerfulness. To say office without knowing Latin must obviously be much more irksome than saying it as a scholar says it. Neither recitation is irksome if we have sensible sweetness ; but who has that always ? Still in most things, we are always working towards the light, always approaching an understanding of what we are about. But the teasing thing about the spiritual life is, that what we begin to understand immediately changes into something else, as soon as we come to understand it. Grace is always drawing us over the border, into a darkness beyond. Even while we ourselves are in the light, our attractions are far outward in the dimness ahead of us. It is also to be considered that anything like a satisfactory spiritual life implies a great deal of steady self-punishment. A certain quiet unmercifulness towards self is the indispensable condition of all inward peace. We have also to strengthen our hand to a firmer and more vigorous chastisement of self, especially at those times when we are most discouraged by recent and unex-

pected defeats. Yet all the while, so little are we rooted in our work, that any breath is enough to blow us away, when we are engaged in it.

There are many varieties of inward lives. But the features, enumerated above, belong to all of them. They are in the nature of the case. The one thing, which is equally the result of all those numerous causes, is monotony. Of course there is a great deal to be said on the other side. Upon what question is there not? It is true also, that a man may be justly reprovèd for complaining too much of this monotony of piety. A man of great graces may perhaps be reprovèd for complaining at all. But we must deal gently with the great multitude of those who are honestly trying to keep closer to God than a mere avoiding of sin implies. There are some who treat with dignified contempt, not only the complaint, but the very feeling of this monotony. They deny that there can be any solid virtue where such a feeling exists, except as the merest transitory temptation. Rather may we say, that where contempt exists, no solid virtue can exist. Indeed it is shrewdly to be suspected that those, who have not felt this burden of monotony, have only escaped the feeling, because the burden they have tried to carry was so exceedingly little, or because they have carried it only a little way. A man, who has always found it plain sailing, and has never failed to have sun and stars visible when he wanted them for observations, may be sure he is sailing over a pacific ocean of his own, very different from the wild, uncertain, clouded seas, where saints and saint-like men so often find themselves at the mercy of wind and weather.

But let us look at the matter from an opposite point of view. Most of most men's success in life comes from the vigorous play of their natural activity. The abbot *Esaias* says, that of the three things necessary to the pursuit of

perfection natural activity is one.\* Even good works owe no little of their success to this. It has been observed that men, who go about the country giving missions and retreats with all the excitement of fresh air, new faces, new places, new work, and the energetic reactions after physical weariness, find it difficult to cultivate a really, or at least a profoundly, interior spirit. The chronicles of religious orders are full of examples of this, and the arrangements of saintly founders exhibit a presentiment of it. The admiration men have for the exceptions is a conclusive demonstration of the rule. The truth is, natural activity is most eager to save grace the trouble of working; and it may safely be confessed that this same natural activity does no little of the outside work of the Church, and does it well. It has not *often* happened, though there are notable exceptions, † that successful mission-preachers or converters have been eminent directors. They want the inward peace, the leisurely concentration, and the habit of not looking for results, which for the most part build up a safe and intelligent director.

Now what is it which gives our lives the *swing*, which men see and admire, and by which we accomplish our successes?

It is the intrinsic joyousness of natural activity. We are inspirited by our own effervescence. Our life seems to accumulate by mere speed. We mesmerise ourselves, and so double our powers, and multiply our senses. We are always throwing our innermost selves outside of ourselves, and so producing the most astonishing results. We widen ourselves by this sort of self-externation, and so make ourselves capable of doing more than one man's work. Our

\* *Impetus secundum naturam*, as he calls it. Nigronius confirms this doctrine. See *de diligentia spirituali*, cap. iii. sec. 10.

† For instances of some of these exceptions see the Author's Essay on Catholic Home Missions, pp. 70, 71.



self-love riots in the stimulus of enthusiasm, and becomes downright power in the excitement of success. We live in the midst of inward shouts and cheers and huzzaing, until we seem all fortitude, and learn to disbelieve in the impossible. We do various work, and variety always multiplies the amount of work at least by ten. Our results are visible, and the vision of them is a grand attraction. There is nothing dry about results. They fatten self-love, and a well-fed self-love, what should ever tire it, what may it not hope to do, what expectations can ever be reasonably considered unreasonable to such a thing as it is? Results also make a noise, and noise is an endless battle-cry to an active spirit. Silence is the wearing thing, thin and unsatisfactory and void where the soul is not full of God. Among many results some must be great ones, and their greatness is an intoxication. Then an external life, when it is at full swing, is replete with changes and contrasts, which make it as interesting to us as a romance. We have no time to get tired of anything. The scenes in the drama are too short rather than too long. All this increases our speed, and with our speed our momentum, and with our momentum our facility. Our arms lengthen, and we embrace the world. Then comes the delighted complaint of the multiplicity and the manifoldness of what we have to do, and our speed never lets us see how unsatisfactorily we are doing it all. Quantity is what the world admires, and so we are hounded on by praise. Nobody finds fault. They are too busy staring. You cannot both stare and speak at once. Staring requires the whole face. We throw details overboard, and look only at generals. Now we can be busy without being fatigued. Those details—they were the drag, the vexation, secret nests of responsibility every one of them, and greediest devourers of time. We are positively out of breath ourselves with the speed of our lives, and the downright awful-

ness of our success. Yet there is a seeming dignity about having too many things to do which to the eye of the world envelopes us in an appearance of repose. We seem to be marching through life, marching to music, while we are in reality tearing through it, like a planet got loose in space.

This is the kind of life for *swing*, for natural activity, for visibility of results. This is the kind of life in which a little grace goes furthest, or seems to do so. What is the opposite of all this? The spiritual life? What a change! Burrowing in the dark, hidden from all men; for all comfortable purposes hidden even from ourselves. Silence and deep night, solitude and a strange place, an element in which we move sluggishly like tortoises, a land overshadowed by dread presences, haunted by phantoms of evil, terrified by possibilities, which are more often likelihoods, of sin, a sort of peevish concentration of distraction about details, an altogether microscopic life! What a change! It is as if we had become deaf all at once, and blind a few minutes afterwards. This is the picture of the self-hindered man praying his way into the neighbourhood of the supernatural; for that is not a place into which he can ever think his way, or speak his way, or push his way. The prospect is one of boundless monotony, when the horrified eye of natural activity gazes over it; and alas! there are few of us that are worth more, than the worth which our natural activity confers upon us.

But is it then really and definitely decided that a thing on which so much depends, and which is made up of such component parts, as the spiritual life, is uninteresting? It is hard not to suspect some fallacy in such a conclusion. In reply to this we may say, that the feeling of monotony does not arise so much from the nature of the spiritual life itself, as from the imperfect and wounded state of our own nature. It is one of the phases of our fallen state, and its

consequent unworthiness. Eternal interests do not excite our sluggishness. It is not they that are uninteresting, but we that are uninterested. Neither again is it a feeling always felt, but only at times. And least at those times when the spiritual life has most its own way. But there is something more than this to be said. We must distinguish somewhat between monotonous and uninteresting. A thing may be interesting and yet monotonous; nay, it is possible that the very interest of a thing may increase its monotony. Now it happens that this is actually the case with the spiritual life. It is made more monotonous by the very things which make it most interesting.

When an intense seriousness accompanies every step in a long line of actions, and those actions remain the same in the same place, to be accomplished in the same way, through a repetition of the same obstacles, and with only the same results, the seriousness will increase the burden of the monotony. Sunny natures are so light, and gloomy natures so peevish, that they can neither of them bear the yoke of seriousness long; for seriousness is as little congenial to gloom as it is to lightness. Yet this same seriousness must run alongside the spiritual life in its longest length. We never part company with it except through a fall. We cease to be spiritual when we cease to be serious. Moreover we have to do with God always, and to do with Him in the most intimate way; and in divine things that which is most intimate is also most frightening. Reverence is a constraint, yet to lose reverence is to lose everything. But constraint is enough of itself to create monotony; or rather, when long continued, and with a pressure which does not vary much, it of itself becomes monotony. Sin, either in its past, present, or future tense, runs right through the composition of the spiritual life, and above all things keeps us on the alert. Yet the perpetually fretting shadow, and

the perpetually starting at shadows, makes the journey extremely monotonous, while these shadows are also themselves its most painful interests. Neither does our poor nature like to be kept always in the same posture. It wishes to yawn; it would fain fold its arms; at least it must be allowed to stretch its legs. Always to sit, always to stand, always to lie down, all are equally insupportable: but to be always kneeling,—the thought of it is terrible. Yet the spiritual life is not a work at which we can take liberties. The very gravity of its interests forbids that. But a change of posture is a liberty; frequent change of posture an unsafe liberty, indeed incompatible with true spirituality. The interest of piety also disallows its indulging in any recreation. We cannot give our consciences a holiday, or give over prayer for a while, as we give over lessons. The tension must be always on us, not an unvarying tension certainly, yet a tension. The bow is always bent, and will take a year to recover its having been an hour unstrung. The height of the prize at which we aim augments our strain. The attitude fittest for star-gazing does not comport itself comfortably with our anatomy. The risk is tremendous; and a tremendous jeopardy, while it is terribly interesting, is insufferably monotonous. Then after all, we have come to think so little trustfully or gallantly of our poor degenerate nature, that final perseverance, as a grace God keeps in His own hands to the last, looks only like a chance in a supernatural lottery. Indeed it is not so; for it is a grace which an earnest life can secure, though the holiest life cannot merit it. Yet it *looks* like a lottery, and this adds to the interest by increasing the nervousness. Yet what monotony is worse than a continuity of fear? Thus it is, that the interests of the spiritual life are, from their peculiar character, the feeders of its monotony.

We have then made out a case against piety, namely, that

it is monotonous. Now what is the good of all this enquiry? What profit is there in the charge, and in the laborious substantiation of it? We shall succeed in discouraging people more than they are discouraged already. Is that what we wish? Surely the very opposite. Illogical as it may seem, there are few things more consoling to men than the mere finding that other men have felt as they feel. Neither is it in reality illogical. Special evils are the most frightening; and that evil cannot be special, which is confessed to be part of the experience of others. We feel piety to be monotonous. As was said at first, the service of God is often a sensible drag upon us. It becomes flat and dull, failing to excite us, and degenerating into a wearisome constraint. There is always something more than this in it, but that something lies deep down. What is on the surface is monotony, and dulness, and a struggle just on the point, for ever on the point, of ceasing to be a struggle at all. There are times when the sense of all this well nigh overweights us. They are moods certainly, but moods so long, so seldom interrupted, and interrupted for so short a time at once, that, in some stages of the spiritual life, they seem almost to amount to a normal state. It is miserable to find the service of God so wearisome. The more earnestly we love Him, the more profoundly we fear Him, then so much the greater is the misery. When we compare the briskness and agility, the unsleeping interest and the beguiling attractions, of our worldly occupations, with the dead, flat, sluggish feeling which comes over us in regard to our prayers and mortifications, there is something extremely depressing in this feeling of monotony. Surely, then, it is no little consolation to find, that it is not merely an evil symptom of our own spiritual condition, a sign against our own individual predestination, but that it is part of our great human disease, belonging to our common mis-

fortune, and all but universal among those who are honestly striving to serve God in the intimacies of an interior life.

In our strife to be supernatural, it is natural then that we should be haunted by this heavy shadow of monotony. It is no cause for discouragement, because everybody else suffers from it more or less at times, unless, when it begins to gall them, they give up struggling; and to give up struggling is to give up God. Nowhere does it furnish us with any legitimate reason for being disheartened. For it does not imply any actual sin, or any past incompleteness in our confessions, or any secret corroding fault. As I have hinted, even its long continuance is often a cheering sign, because it is also a sign that we have continued to struggle. Surely there is manifold comfort here.

Comfort! Yes—but what we want are cures. This is what you would say. True: but let me take this opportunity of saying something to you, which I regard of the utmost importance. Indeed I know few things more important. What I am always complaining of in you spiritual people is your unreality. I suffer, like poor Cassandra, from always making distasteful prophecies to you about this. Now I will go further, and find the same fault of unreality with a very great number of spiritual books. It is taken for granted that every spiritual disease has a cure, not a partial alleviation, not a counterbalancing comfort, not a check which shall hinder its becoming fatal, but an absolute cure, a specific which shall end in a complete restoration to health. I get quite angry with books and sermons for the thoughtless things they say about this. Surely it is a simple untruth. In the matter of bodily health, there are diseases which cannot be cured, wounds which will leave us maimed or lamed to the end of life, constitutional maladies which can be controlled and limited, yet never cured. With such evils we have to content our-



selves with medical superintendence, ceaseless physic, a dietary yoke, and the like. Why should we be surprised at finding similar maladies in the spiritual life? Look at the absurdity of the opposite supposition. You do not surely believe in the perfectibility of human nature on this side the grave. You do not expect that you can reach a state of sinlessness before you die, or that your corrupt nature shall become incorruptible, while it is still mortal. Yet your vexation when you cannot have a regular cure, cut and dried, for every spiritual disease, implies that you indulge in these monstrous expectations. Some spiritual maladies are incurable in themselves, because of our nature. This is true of self-deceit, and of several other forms of self-love. Others are incurable in the individual case; and this may arise from past sin, or from natural character, or from unchangeable outward circumstances. In some cases the knowledge of the evil is all we can attain to. In many cases the management of the mischief is our highest attainment. In others the diminution of it is the utmost we can hope. Surely this is the common sense. The other doctrine, besides being nonsense, is a grand source of discouragement, while it also fomenters unreality, and fosters delusions. Spiritual books are, in a great measure, to blame for it. It is so tempting to be systematic, to set off salves against wounds, antidotes against poisons, to look complete, to encourage, to be popular, to exaggerate our inventions, to puff our nostrums. We call this quackery when it is applied to the body. Why does it deserve a kindlier name, when it is applied to the soul? The saints tell us we are to be patient with ourselves to the last. Now to be patient means to endure; it means that some things, if not many things, will remain in self, with which self will have to be patient to the end, that is some things which cannot be cured. We are not told by the saints to be patient with

our sins, but with our sicknesses, those sicknesses of the soul, under which sanctification consists, not in the cure, but in the combat. The practical man is the man who does the best he can under the circumstances. You must distinguish between incurable and irreparable. I have often told you that no mischief in the spiritual life is irreparable; but I never meant you to understand by that, that there are no evils in the spiritual life which are incurable. I hope you will not forget this distinction. If you do, you will misunderstand many things, which it may greatly concern you to understand. A spiritual director is a physician. Do you ever expect to do without a director? If not, then you contemplate the necessity of being in an ailing state to the end. This is all I want you to admit:—in the spiritual life nothing is irremediable, but several things are most certainly incurable. The normal state of spirituality is at best that of a vigorous, cheerful, hearty invalid, who is obliged, in order to keep up to his work, not only to take great care of himself, but to be upon his guard against a great many things, and, in spite of his vigilance, to have a good deal to endure.

But, to return from this digression, what are we to do with our monotony? Are we to be simply passive under it? Certainly not. But what will help us out of it? Making haste will not, and this is the first thing to take note of. This negative piece of advice is worth more than anything positive which I can say: at least I judge so, from the entanglement and low spirits into which I see people fret themselves by trying to get out of it through making haste. Properly speaking, all difficulties in the spiritual life partake of the nature of entanglements; and this also is a thing very much to be observed; for it is another argument, and they never can be needlessly multiplied, for slowness in the way of holiness, that prompt

slowness, of which I have spoken so repeatedly, that I see you smile when I reiterate it, as if it were the burden of all my songs. Haste, then, is not the road out of this entanglement of monotony. Mortification, especially bodily mortification, is the shortest way out of it, as indeed it is always the shortest way to cheerfulness and supernatural joy. Everything that tends to fervour tends also to make this burden of monotony less sensible, like wine and food which cure weariness as well as satisfy hunger, curing the weariness by curing the weakness. This need not be dwelt upon; but there is one thing more which should be said. To look at that dull, odious, repulsive, grey monotony, who could suspect it was the raw material of the very highest of all high graces? Yet so it is. That haunting monotony is, in a brave, striving, quiet soul, always tending to become simplicity, the peculiar simplicity of the spiritual life, which is a glorious shadow of the Unity of God, and wherein God becomes all in all. This is what the monotony merges in, and then the trial becomes a grace, the pusillanimity a heroism. Strangest of transformations! Yet there *are* strange things in an inward life, and most of them have the character of transformations. Its phenomena are given to be transfigurations. It is true that the degree of simplicity, in which the pusillanimity becomes a heroism, belongs to a high and advanced state of things. But the trial becomes a grace in much lower states. But why should you think of anything less than the highest? This feeling of monotony makes me think you should aim high; for it is the proof of something genuine and real in your present attainments. You have but one thing to do.—Sink deeper down in prayer.

*HEAVEN AND HELL.*

I WONDER what the old saints in Heaven think of modern spirituality. Certainly to all appearance the nineteenth century is a very exceptional time. But then I have misgivings that all times seem so, as they are passing. Each generation magnifies the good and exaggerates the evil of its own day, while in history one century falls back into the lap of another in a very quiet, unexciting, and commonplace manner. However it is plain that the nineteenth century is not a congenial season for old-fashioned things; and, as in other things, so in the matter of spirituality, there are changes. The great books of the seventeenth century undoubtedly innovated upon the elder writers in many not insignificant respects. Even in one religious order, the Jesuits, we find the school of Nigronius and Lancicius very different from that which prevailed less than a century later. Certainly, just now, the Church is singularly mixed up with the world. The public action of catholic charity is materially changed. Increased luxury, combined perhaps with other causes, has superinduced a valetudinarian state over a large portion of society. Fewer men can fast. Fewer women can wear instruments of penance. People take cold more easily. We cannot think of a hermit in the fens of Lincolnshire, or in the wet woods of Picardy, without marvelling how his life contrived to be anything but a chronic rheumatism. There is less simplicity; and hence the exercises of some virtues become more difficult, especially ostensible practices

of humility. More civilisation gives us less individuality; and hence the danger of singularity cuts off many opportunities of sanctification. Mental habits are different, more rapid, more introverted, more self-conscious; and this must necessarily tell hugely upon the whole subject of prayer. All these things seem to indicate, that we must have spiritual systems for our own day, just as our fathers had them for their day. Nevertheless I often sit and think, in a forlorn kind of way, what a disconsolate thing it is to part company with any old traditions, however insignificant; and the more so in a subject matter of the most urgent concern to all of us, and in a time, which seems to labour under a special unfitness for readapting to its use the older spirituality of the saints. You see, while times change very much, souls change very little, and God not at all. So I cannot help thinking, that, though a few things may want moving just now to different places, the antique spirit has to return again, in matters which regard both the ecclesiastical and the ascetic temper. Some day or other, we shall have to go back to the Fathers of the Desert, or to Richard of St. Victor, or to the earliest school of Jesuit ascetics. The day has not come yet, and will not in our time. So we must take what heart we can, and face the sickly unsupernatural spirituality we see around us, and do what good we can by condescensions and adaptations, which may save a soul or two here and there, taking care all the while, for the sake of our own sanctification, to keep grumbling about that antique spirit and that old-fashioned wisdom, which we believe to be the only real thing.

Now I want to speak about a little matter in the conduct of modern pious people, which I am so sure is wrong that I cannot be content to let it alone; and I will try to be good-natured, while I am discontented; and as little sarcastic as I can help being, remembering that there is no piece of

modern piety of which I know so little good as I do of my own. I only wish I knew whether the old saints in heaven really thought, that our pleasant, unoffending, moderate, contented, polished, civilised spirituality was so much as safe. People rebel, if you try to put more upon them ; and do we, as a matter of fact, get much more out of ourselves ? One question we are sure we never can solve,—the way to serve both God and mammon : but how near may we come ? Yes ! look at upper-class piety in London and Paris, and then ask, how near may we come ? We dare not be sure we are right in being contented, because it looks so unlike the right of old times. We dare not be sure we are wrong ; for, then, what consequences follow, what wholesale delusions, what cashiering of multitudes in the armies of perfection and devotion, what rough work with vocations, absolutions, and the like ! Sometimes it is so weary a problem, that we are fain to think men would be holier with a sounder and more robust holiness, if they would leave the Counsels, and take to the Commandments.

Now to my subject, without further elegy. The great want of modern piety is a real, deep, vigorous, inward repentance. If you dance till four in the morning, and go to communion at ten, I do not believe in your abiding sorrow for sin. If you are in the theatre till midnight, I do not credit the compunction of your morning's meditation. If you are just like any other fashionable person, I can set no value upon your profession of devotion. Piety and gaiety do not mix ; and in this matter, to speak shortly, and once for all, I do not believe in mixtures. But I say modern piety is defective in the matter of inward repentance : I do not say it is destitute of it, but seriously defective ; and I prove it as follows.

We see persons on all sides of us, who are certainly good persons. They are endeavouring to avoid sin, and on the



whole successfully. They would fain eschew worldliness; but in that effort they are hardly so successful. Truly it is a more difficult affair. They are making some profession of strictness and devotion. They rank with pious people. Yet penance is plainly not a feature of the lives they are leading. Their love of pleasure, their appearance at places of worldly resort, their unstinted enjoyment of the prevailing fashions and amusements, nay, the very ease, elegance, propriety, equability, and smoothness of their spirituality, all betoken a very imperfect idea of abiding sorrow for sin, or of that inward self-revenge, which should increase in us daily the older we grow. The way in which worldliness and religion are pounded up together is quite decisive as to their inadequate notion of inward repentance. It is fortunate for such persons, if their piety does not degenerate into a mere familiarity with sacred names and things, which will be a great impediment to their future conversion.

The systems of spirituality which are most in vogue, are marked by the same characteristics. It seems as if they were arranged for a lower standard of holiness than that of God; as if the souls, for which they were meant, were the rule and measure of sanctity, and not the evangelical counsels or the exceedingly holy law of God. To do as those around us do, so long as it is not plain sin, is part of their wisdom. To avoid singularity does not mean, in the language of these systems, what it means in old spiritual writers. Here it signifies that we are to go with the stream, and to put our piety out of the way when it is likely to be distasteful to those who make no profession of piety at all. To be at peace is the highest attainment of this philosophy; and whatever disquiets a soul is, on that account alone, a positive evil, and to be eschewed. Thus, if a soul is deluded, it must remain deluded; if it is lukewarm, it must remain lukewarm; if it is sluggish, its slumbers must be respected. Now think of the

proportion of good people, as they are called, who are either deluded, or lukewarm, or sluggish ; and then reflect on the inevitable consequences of this undiscerning and promiscuous avoidance of what is disturbing and discomforting. Of a truth, it would be a safer rule to lay down, that we can none of us be too much or too often discomforted, provided only we can bear being discomforted without being discouraged also. Penance can be no child of such lax and slatternly systems as these. Yet how many souls in these days dread what they call exciting direction a thousand times more than they abhor a mortal sin ! Indeed they do not know what they mean by exciting direction, and could not define it, if you called upon them to do so. What they intend to express is only an instinct against reality and earnestness.

Here is another feature of modern piety, which meets us at almost every turn : the continual mistaking of common graces for uncommon ones. The lower and the higher graces are counterparts of each other. A very high grace may wonderfully resemble a very low grace ; and, unless we have tasted it, that is, had experimental knowledge of it, we may easily confound it with its analogue among much lower things. We think we feel what the saints have recorded that they felt, because the description of it in language is too coarse to convey a right notion of an operation so delicate. Then, if we satisfy ourselves on any one point, it brings a change over our whole spiritual life ; because a spiritual life is a very inveterate unity. It changes our method of prayer, and interprets our position towards God quite in a new way, and, as it happens, in an erroneous way. Now this mistake comes of everybody in these times being in such a hurry to get out of the purgative way ; and this impatience of commencements partly bears witness to a want of inward repentance, and partly increases the want,

as rendering us unable to appreciate it. This is a long subject, and we must not say more of it now.

There is moreover a deeply imbedded naturalism, which betrays itself everywhere in the modern views of the spiritual life. There is an evident desire to sacrifice the supernatural to the prejudices of those who dislike it. Men are eager to fix the charge of extravagance upon those who stand up boldly for the rights of God, and speak uncompromisingly about worldliness. The vague notions people have of vocations, and their jealousy of the whole subject, are additional evidences of this naturalism. Low practical views of the sovereignty of God arise from the same source. The lives of the saints, indulgences, and devotions connected with purgatory, are the touchstones of this naturalism. Real searching inward repentance changes a man's whole notions about all these subjects. It unlocks the hidden wisdom of the church system to him, and transforms his sympathies and instincts into those of the saints. Naturalism is impatient of godliness, because it has no taste for God: and how much depends precisely upon having this *taste* for God! Under the auspices of naturalism, spirituality tends to become a mere literature to intellectual curiosity, or a mere pleasurable excitement to unearnest and half-hearted devotion, or a relish to worldliness by way of contrast.\*

The amount of almsgiving, and the manner in which it is given, also inspire me with a distrust of modern piety, especially in regard to the reality of its inward repentance. A

\* This question of naturalism is one of the most important in these days of catholic revival. It were greatly to be wished that Dom Guéranger's exceedingly interesting volume could be compressed, and reduced to form, so as to present to impatient readers the principles of naturalism, its dangers and its remedies, in a compact and lucid way. The successive criticisms of M. de Broglie's book distract the reader, and disconnect the subject. Nevertheless it is a most valuable contribution to catholic literature, even in its present unattractive form. *Essais sur le Naturalisme Contemporain* par R. P. D. Guéranger. Julien, Lanier et Cie. Paris.

very inward thing always, or almost always, has very outward results; and these outward results are congenial to itself. Penance is the best guarantee for the inwardness of our repentance, and almsgiving is notably a chief part of penance. Inward repentance is not a feeling within us, but a change within us; and it is not easy for us to be changed inwardly without manifesting it outwardly. Thus I cannot bring myself to believe that a professedly pious person, who is very guarded in giving alms, has the genuine spirit of inward repentance. Now in the present day it is not uncommon to see pious people acting, as if they really thought their piety in other respects was almost a dispensation from almsgiving. Others, again, when they give, give in ways which minister to their own humours; so that even in almsgiving self-love shall find its account. Moreover generosity is not almsgiving. The quantity given must have reference to the means of the giver, but still more to the amount of sacrifice and self-denial which his alms entail upon him. Expensiveness is perhaps not a distinct sin in itself, though even that may be questioned; but it is the mother of many sins, and it is remarkably uncongenial to the spiritual life. Yet pious people are particularly given to be expensive, when they have the means. An alms, which does not put the giver to inconvenience, is rather a kindness than an alms; and certainly the alms, which is to be a satisfactory evidence of inward repentance, ought to reach the point of causing some palpable inconvenience, of involving some solid self-denial. Now, if a professedly pious person has to retrench, and begins his retrenchments with his charities, does not this suggest grave suspicions as to the inward self-revenge of his repentance? Does it look as if his sins were always before him, or as if he had the scriptural fear of forgiven sin, or as if he worshipped the exactions of divine justice with anything like a hearty and vigorous worship?

Depend upon it, a man's parting with his money is one of the proofs of his having right views about God and sin, which is least liable to delusion or self-deceit. If we look to the dress, and the equipage, and the furniture, and the children first, and then to God afterwards, it is pretty plain that God's real place in the heart, no matter what the feelings may say, is after the dress, and the equipage, and the furniture, and the children. For, feelings are easily fancied, and are also often themselves very fanciful even when they are genuine.

In nothing is the genuine worth of real spirituality more tried than in the performance of works of mercy. An interior spirit proves itself in these external operations. To work for the poor in a spiritual way requires many graces, and often graces of a high order. Natural activity, which helps the beginnings of works, comes at last to generate weariness, and so to fight against their perseverance. A slight admixture of natural feeling, or the indulgence of natural affection, is often sufficient to forfeit God's blessing on a difficult undertaking. No one carries out charitable plans, or conducts benevolent institutions, successfully, unless he is at once detached from his work and attached to it. But the harmony of these apparently opposite qualities implies a well-grounded spirituality. Patience, love, vigilance, inventiveness, wide judgments, a large heart, and an obstinate cheerfulness are all necessary to the persevering success of real works of mercy, together with that humble, bashful earnestness which is such a peculiar feature of Christian compassion. To beg for a work of charity is an exercise of holy poverty, which few have the grace to go through without a multitude of venial sins, perhaps in God's sight the most venial of venial sins that can be. The criticisms of idle men, the doubts of icy men, the narrowness of good men, and the censoriousness of all

men, are also hard to bear; and yet a work is worth little, and does not make the devil uneasy, if it has not had to endure these irritating molestations. From some points of view, an active saint is a more complicated work of grace than a contemplative one.

But let us look at the popular modern spirituality in connection with this test of external works of mercy. The London season does not more surely bring with it new modes of dress, than it brings also with it new plans of doing good and benefiting the poor. When we have not had much experience, we respect all this. Anything seems good which is for the poor. What a gain that the rich of this world should take a fancy to any works of mercy no matter what! But this satisfaction soon passes away, when the vexatious sight of money squandered, of time wasted, of beginnings discontinued, of inert committees organized, of the obvious pursuit of excitement and self-love in the whole matter, has tried our patience year after year. It is also the more difficult to keep our temper with inefficient charity, because it is so seldom innocuous as well as inefficient. Now we get a glimpse of what this spirituality is worth. A Mahometan with his five posture-penances a day is a happy man; for he feels he must do something to make his conscience easy, something for God, something in the way of religion: and he has done it, done enough to make him feel he has done something. So it is with these annual fashions of charity. Christians must *feel* as if they were doing something for God; or else they will not be easy. So they get up a good work. It takes some time to call on others, and talk it over. Some further time to take the advice of half a dozen popular preachers or directors. A little more time to decide on following the advice of none of them. Then some clerical head has to be chosen for the work, and that takes time. After that, the Lent



services render any other excitement unnecessary just then. Now Easter has come, and there is an interruption because of people going down into the country. Then the Month of Mary has excitements of its own ; and it is well advanced before the committee is formed. When it is formed, it has to meet. When it meets, it naturally talks. What would happen if it began to *do* anything, it is impossible to say. We cannot think of that without some degree of consternation. However there is the excitement of having to work with strange people, the important excitement in some cases of having to try to get government aid or to call on philanthropic magistrates, and the peculiar excitement perhaps of having to work with our inferiors in rank and station, and so to practice the condescensions of a sort of Christian freemasonry, which somehow or other satisfies some nameless craving in our conscience. Meanwhile the season thickens, and at last closes. All that was wanted has been done ; for all that was wanted was the self-righteous feeling that we were very busy for God, and also the manifold satisfaction of half a dozen kinds of self-love. The excitement has been pleasant, the feeling of being good more pleasant still ; and the fact, that it has all come to an end without our having had to pay anything for it, has been without doubt the pleasantest feature of the transaction. It has got us through the season. We could enjoy our expensiveness more comfortably while we believed ourselves on the road to some considerable imaginary alms. An hour of committee, besides being chatty and agreeable, will sanctify long, long hours of shopping. What a wonderful exercise of humility was that conventual bazaar ! Our intense delight in the salient worldliness of the year, whatever it was, has been well counteracted by the dim vision of romantic garrets, or of interesting orphans, or of palsied pensioners, or of picturesque young thieves, or of reclaimed

children in tasteful uniforms, or of distant idolaters, or of domestic hunger-bitten heathen. It has all been the ounce of God to the hundredweight of the world, the adequate corrective, the proper proportion of alkali to our acid.

Yet almsgiving was not exactly meant as a corrective of worldliness. Might not light be let into many minds, if they would distinctly put before themselves the final cause of riches? Why are there any rich people at all, and what does God mean by them? For there is only one real truth about any of the facts of the world, and that truth is God's meaning of the fact, God's intention in the ordering or permitting of it. Now what are rich people meant for? They are not made rich for their own good. That is quite plain. A man's good consists in the saving of his soul; but it is plain riches do not help him to save his soul, rather the contrary. Jesus would not have riches, when He came. Nay, He pronounced woe to those who have them. When the saints have had them, they have made away with them as fast as they could. Riches, if the Gospel be true, are the unheavenliest of all earthly things. Why then are some men put into a less advantageous position than others, so far as regards the salvation of their souls, by having riches allotted to them? What are rich people meant for? To be the prey of the poor. Prey! there is no other word for it. The rich are meant for the poor. The poor are the cause and the significancy, as they will be also the salvation, of the rich. The poor are God's eagles to beset, infest, and strip the rich. He alone is happy in his riches, who lets these eagles of God tear him with least resistance. That process, rich man! is what thou art meant for. God had no other intention in thee. If there be a heaven and a hell, there is nothing which it more behoves thee to know than this peculiarity of thy position. Are the poor wearisome, grasping, unseasonable, insatiable, unreasonable, innumer-

able, unbearable? It is more unreasonable in thee to complain. They were meant to prey upon thee: thou wert meant to be their prey. That is the whole account of thee. Give then, and be silent.

To sum it all up:—Look at the eccentricities in almsgiving, at the appetite for novelties, at the neglect of old charities, at the infinite subdivision of efforts which are thus completely neutralised, at the prominence of self, at the self-opinionatedness, at the folio volumes of talk or the duodecimo volumes of notepaper, at the subordinate position of God in the matter, at the little amount of keen sympathy for the misery to be dealt with, at the less amount of self-denial in the dealing with it, and, last of all, at the astounding moderation of the subscriptions. Surely all this testifies to a huge amount of delusion and fond inward flattering of self in the spirituality around us. It sometimes almost makes one think that works of mercy are simply an imposture. But, all the while, the imposture lies in a spirituality without solid mortification. Tried in the balance of outward charity, how much fair-looking interior piety is grievously found wanting! If all this is ill-natured, is it not also true? Depend upon it, genuine mercy is very rare. Real almsgivers must have either an unusual nobility of natural character, or a very solid virtue. Devotion to the poor is, in its disinterested purity, the rarest grace in sanctity. In its debased state, it is one of the commonest features of a piety, the unsoundness of which is testified by nothing so much as the unreality of its mercy.

Many feel this, and so take no pains about works of mercy. Indeed we might not unreasonably find fault with modern piety altogether, for its want of balance between inward and outward things, between spiritual exercises and works of mercy for the poor. We do not become interior by trying not to be exterior. If we try to be interior only,

we soon cease to be interior at all, if ever we were so before. For the most part a spiritual exercise costs nothing; it is done in secret; and it may be done in a hundred ways, from the highest strain of reverential attention down to the slovenliness of lolling postures and voluntary distractions. It costs no money. It involves no personal trouble. Hence it is no evidence of sincerity. Least of all, is it any token of the spirit of penance. The eagerness, with which we are told that external mortifications are almost worthless compared with interior mortifications, breeds distrust. The proposition itself is most true; and there are times and places, in which it needs preaching forcibly. It is not the proposition, then, which makes us distrustful. It is the eagerness with which it is urged, which is the suspicious symptom. I fear that a great deal of this private soul-saving, which is so much the fashion just now, indicates little more than an unwillingness to part with money, or a reluctance to be teased, fretted, and hard worked by plans for the poor. Anyhow we may be sure of this, that there is always a holy restlessness, an insatiable activity, about the spirit of inward repentance, whose deportment is very different from this easy-going, money-saving, stay-at-home devotion.

Modern piety has also a guilty instinct for a false discretion which is very unlike the swift straightforwardness or the headlong generosity of inward repentance. If you listen to the conversation, for example, of devout ladies, who habitually form themselves into a kind of self-nominated Congregation of the Index about sermons, direction, vocations, religious orders, spiritual books, and the like, you would imagine that half catholic London is disciplining itself to blood, that there are two or three hundred hair-shirts at the Opera every night, that the floor of the palace is strewn with horrid, nondescript instruments of penance after every drawing-

room or royal ball, that the health of the West End, which so successfully resisted late hours and turning night into day, is now succumbing under lentils and long prayers and bodily macerations, and that parents and husbands, who were once thrown into a fever by the dangers of an early communion and a few mouthfuls of fresh air taken fasting between home and church, are now obliged to act the spy on those they love, because of the murderous excesses of fanatical penance. This is what you would suppose from the conversation of these good ladies. You may not think their conversation very wise; still you would infer from it that nobody is lukewarm, that nobody wants stirring up, that everybody wants holding back. Whereas, when you come to know a little of the facts, you will agree with them so far as this,—that the want of discretion is the prevailing stupidity of the day: only you will apply it differently. You will see that people are indiscreetly tepid, indiscreetly self-indulgent, neglecting prayer and weekday mass indiscreetly, indiscreetly niggard in almsgiving, indiscreet in doing so little for God, indiscreet in making so much of the little they do. All this is hideous indiscretion; and, if our lady-congregation of the Index can get rid of any of this for us, we should be forward to bless their labours. Unhappily their discretion lies quite on the other side. Their notion of discretion is to come so close to hell, that even angels tremble to see them, and then just to swerve clear of it. The worst of this is, that, while it is a risk often run, we may fear that its issue is seldom felicitous. We may fear that many of them just swerve into hell; another moment, and they will be clear, like a wheel that is only for an instant over the ledge: but unluckily that moment never comes, and the momentary swerve turns out to be eternal. A moderation, which consists in taking immoderate liberties with God, is hardly what the Fathers of the Desert

meant, when they preached their crusade in favour of discretion. When we meet with these apostles of the new discretion, we feel that the matter is so serious, that we ought to be serious with them; I regret that I am not habitually so: only one has such a tendency to see the ludicrous side of things; and then also we may plead as a further excuse, that unreal persons are always so amusingly, because they are so unconsciously, humorous. However our consciences need not prick us; for experience shows that no good is done to these people by being serious with them. They are not serious themselves. They have no notion of seriousness except being angry; and the best way to cure anger is to punish it by being amused at it. For our present purpose it is plain, that a discretion, whose prominent trait is its aptitude to take umbrage at penance, can hardly be a manifestation of the spirit of penance.

The next fault to find with modern piety is its shallowness. Perhaps people were always as silly as they are now; yet I can hardly imagine that people always thought as little as they do now. The rapidity, with which modern people live, hinders their seeing the depths of anything, just as the enormous superficies, over which their education strains to extend itself, hinders their being well-educated. Even in reading, men now-a-days will not stop to think; and they have too much to read to enable them to read twice. Thought is manifestly at a discount just now; although there will be a change soon, as shallowness is tiresome, and men always abandon what bores them, when the bore reaches to a given point. However, this rapidity, which hinders people from seeing the depths of anything, affects nothing so much as their religion and their relations to God, because religion is all depth, and we might almost say of our relations to God, that they lie too deep to have any surface visible at all. It sometimes looks as if piety had an intrinsic



tendency to be silly. It is to be hoped it is not so. Nevertheless piety is often disfigured by silliness, except when it co-exists either with great grace, or with considerable intellect, or with a keen sense of humour. It would not be fair to say, that piety is always silly when it is not earnest, because unearnest piety is not piety at all. It is only an ill-done caricature. Now the deepest of all spiritual things is inward repentance. It is based on a supernaturally illuminated self-knowledge. It implies a profound view of the sinfulness of sin. It lives in a clear vision of the perfections of God, which almost anticipates the brightness of the Vision hereafter. It is entangled with all manner of supernatural things, with secrets of prayer, with saintlike instincts, with curious operations of grace, and with the nameless fruits of patient meditations. Rapid livers and rapid thinkers make rapid worshippers; and rapid worshippers are rapid penitents; and the spirit of inward repentance fares ill with all this. Deep work is too slow for our modern pace. A railway embankment is another thing from a Roman road.

Another feature of modern piety is its fastidiousness. This is a very stronghold of Satan. It hides God. It refuses to study His mysteries. It saps the foundations of holy fear. It derogates from devotion to the Passion. It forms a screen, behind which unchaste spirits work at leisure. Every one is familiar with this fastidiousness. I need not speak of it at length here, as I have dwelt upon it in my book upon the Passion, and shall have to refer to it later on in this Conference. It is sufficient to say that the fastidiousness here complained of is neither an elegance nor a delicacy, but a plain demand on the part of the world, that we should practically give up a part of the Gospel. It manifests itself by an impatience with anything like devotion to the Passion in detail, as involving horrors which harrow up the soul, and dislodge that precious peace, which modern

spirituality watches over as if it were the palladium of holiness, and which is in reality nothing but the sleep of death. Alas ! how much better should we be, if we could be harrowed up a little now and then ? We should shrink more from sin, if we shrank less from the physical atrocities of the Passion. The same fastidiousness is angry and disgusted with sermons on hell. But of this hereafter. No more need be said here, than that, ordinarily speaking, a reluctance to look hell in the face is a bad sign in devotion, and affords no insignificant probability that we shall really go there at last. Now observe : the Passion and Hell are the two great fountains, out of which men learn a profound hatred of sin : they are the two wellheads of sacred fear ; they are two revelations of God most necessary to complete a true idea of Him. But inward repentance turns upon the hatred of sin, upon fear, and upon the completeness of our idea of God. Thus our modern fastidiousness does what it can to render inward repentance inadequate, by holding a veil before the two revealed objects out of which that inward repentance is to draw its life. If this fastidiousness were the unassisted mawkishness of natural effeminacy, it might be despised as such. But it is in reality a very intelligent contrivance of the arch deceiver, and very fatal to the interests of God, because it is a trap into which good people fall.

I have another unpopular complaint to make. The old-fashioned hatred of heresy is becoming scarce. God is not habitually looked at as the sole truth ; and so the existence of heresies no longer appals the mind. It is assumed that God must do nothing painful, and His dominion must not allow itself to take the shape of an inconvenience or a trammel to the liberty of His creatures. If the world has outgrown the idea of exclusiveness, God must follow our lead, and lay it aside as a principle in His dealings with us.

What the many want they must have at last. This is the rule and the experience of a constitutional country. Thus discord in religion, and untruth in religion, have come to be less odious and less alarming to men, simply because they are accustomed to them. It requires courage, both moral and mental, to believe the whole of a grand nation in the wrong, or to think that an entire century can go astray. But theology, with a brave simplicity, concludes a whole world under sin, and sees no difficulty in the true church being able to claim only a moderate share of the population of the earth. The belief in the facility of salvation outside the church is very agreeable to our domestic loves and to our private friendships. Moreover, if we will hold this, the world will pardon a whole host of other superstitions in us, and will do us the honour of complimenting the religion God gave, as if it were some literary or philosophical production of our own. Is this such a huge gain? Many seem amazingly pleased with it, and pay dear for it quite contentedly. Now it is plain that this belief must lower the value of the church in our eyes. It must relax our efforts to convert others. It must relax our efforts to convert ourselves. Those, who use the system of the church least, will of course esteem it least, and see least in it; and are therefore least fitted to be judges of it. Yet it is just these men who are the most forward, and the most generous in surrendering the prerogatives of the church to the exigencies of modern smoothness and universalism. It would be strange, if divine truths were not sometimes harsh to a world lost in corruption and sin. Yet we have not the bravery to hold fast to our principles. We should think priest, and sacrament, and church-membership, of the last consequence to ourselves, if we were dying. But we regard them of too little consequence to our neighbour, to justify a candour which might savour of unpoliteness, or a sincerity

which may be unpopular. Or is it, that we really do not care whether he be saved or not? However, our want of hatred of heresy first lowers our doctrines, and then our standard of practice. Hence it is, that, with the spirit of inward repentance, a love of the church grows also: and that, where there is cordial hatred of sin, cordial hatred of heresy is not far off. All these are antiquated notions: yet I keep running into them unconsciously. I believe we should be more really and validly repentant, if we had a trifle more of the spirit of the old inquisitors about us. I know I ought to be ashamed of this in the meridian splendour of the nineteenth century: but it is a weakness which I cannot overcome, perhaps because I have not made sufficiently earnest efforts to overcome it. Up to this time I continue to hold, that hatred of heresy will go along with genuine inward repentance. I beg of God, in His infinite compassion, to keep alive in me to the last hour of my life the intense hatred of heresy, with which He has inspired me, and which I recognise as His gift. I beg of Him to make it grow in me to an abhorrence far greater than it is yet. Heaven is the land of love; but the hatred of heresy will not diminish there; for the hatred of heresy is the adoring love of God's ever-blessed truth.

Once more: I have spoken of a low standard of doctrine bringing with it a low standard of practice. It is in this matter of a standard that the whole faultiness of modern spirituality consists. But it is difficult to make it clear. Let us try. If we put an absurdly high ideal before us, it ceases to be an ideal at all, because we have no idea of acting up to it. We never reach it. But this does not shame us, because we never expected to reach it. The whole thing was a sham from the first. On the other hand, if we take a very low ideal, we shall never learn humility because we shall be always succeeding; only our success will have no

progress about it. A success, in which it is not worth our while to succeed, is but a success in name. Considering the shortness of life, such a success is almost a failure, because of the waste of time which it implies. Perhaps what I want to find fault with in modern piety may be expressed thus:—that it lives on too low things by pretending to live on too high things. Does this sound enigmatical? Then I must try to make it plainer still. We intend to be moderate and discreet, that is, we do not intend to be like the canonised saints. We intend to avoid mortal sin, and not to be singular by any uncommon out-of-the-way pieties. But, notwithstanding this sage and very intelligible decision, we intend at once to breathe the atmosphere of the saints, and to imitate their liberty of spirit. We will at once soar above the fatigues of meditation, and pray a more free and unshackled prayer. We will dismiss the terrors of our recent conversion, and at once participate in the calm of advanced holiness. We will put aside hell as a motive, and serve God out of a disinterested love. We will throw off the degrading trammels of custody of the senses, and be at once as Gertrude and Teresa were, when they had spent years in that painful custody. There is something vulgar and plebeian in ascetical books: we must have the larger, more airy, less regimental system of the mystics. Thus we make our piety a jumble. In truth, we are still in bed with the fever of a raw and half-complete conversion; but we will drink wine, and now are light-headed, and fancy we are wheeling round mountain pinnacles with the strong-winged eagles of God. We are doing a tinker's work with a watchmaker's tools. We might just as reasonably in our natural lives, dwell in this city of raw fogs and obstructed sunshine, persecuted by our great English appetites, and yet resolve to go without victuals and drink, as the angels do above.

But see what practically comes of all this. In order to be true penitents, we must be continually dissatisfied with ourselves; whereas in this state of things we are never dissatisfied with ourselves, because we are living among unrealities. We certainly have not succeeded in making such seraphic acts of love as St. Teresa: but then we never expected to do so. Neither have we failed in snubbing some low bad passion, such as envy and gluttony, as a converted ticket-of-leave man does, because to say the truth, we never tried to do so. Thus it is, that even so-called pious people do not think themselves sinners, except in a conventional sense. The theological generality is highly inoffensive, and they do not object to be included under that. But, as to anything more individual, and so more humbling, it is a mere matter of words with them, not a spiritual reality which they have tasted inwardly. Yet they are quite unconscious of all this delusion, because they have confused the whole matter by giving high names to low things. The real practical wisdom is this—to take a high standard, but to take low things as our present working tools, because they are best for doing the low work, the far-off work, the initial work, which belongs to us just now.

Of such importance does this matter seem to me, that the whole of the rest of this Conference will be devoted to one illustration of it. It is this: we strain at motives, which are so far above us that they have no reality to us. We aim at disinterested love, before we have half learned interested fear. We leave the notions of rewards and punishments almost out of the spiritual life. Heaven and hell are not cogent daily motives with us. Nothing but experience would make us believe to what an extent this amazing folly, for it is rather a folly than a conceit, is perpetrated. In a word, one crying want of modern spir-



tuality is more of heaven and hell, as the natural and secure means of getting more inward repentance.

But I am met on the threshold with all manner of objections to the consideration of heaven and hell as habitual, homely, familiar motive powers. As to heaven, we are told that all detailed accounts of it must be so entirely fanciful. They, who think so, have little idea how much ascertained theology there is upon this subject, how much scripture tells us, how much the fathers have warrantably inferred, how much has been revealed to the saints, or how much becomes plain to us in humble persistent prayer. Then, again, we are told heaven is too unworldly, that is, it is too unlike the life we are now leading, or the earth we are now living on. It is so unlike, as to be practically powerless as a motive. This needs no refutation. Again, it is said of heaven that it requires meditation before it can be known, and that, when a man has already acquired a habit of meditation, he will not need to be spurred on by the mercenary consideration of heaven. We may answer shortly, that what was practical to David and St. Paul can hardly be too low for us. But, it is rejoined, Isaiah and St. Paul both say that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor man's heart conceived, the joys which make up the life of heaven ; and therefore that we shall only be losing ourselves in resplendent mysteries, if we strive to familiarise ourselves with details of heaven. I reply, Is the incomprehensibility of God admitted as a valid reason for not meditating upon His perfections ? It is added, that a consideration of such a purely interested character is opposed to the modern spirit which talks so grandly against low motives. Granted : the modern spirit does talk grandly ; but does it *act* grandly ? Is it not the spirit of material prosperity, of railway speculations, of commercial frauds, of Stock Exchange diplomacy ? But in truth no man ever began with making heaven a

consideration of interest, who did not soon come to find it a consideration of love ; and the thought of hell, which began with fear for ourselves, ends in devotion to the sanctity of God. Finally, we are told that such meditation is likely to lead to dreaminess. I reply, that, in the first place, I should like to meet with a few of these dreamy people, first to be sure of the fact, which I venture to doubt, and secondly to be sure I should condemn their dreaminess, which I doubt also. I can quite conceive a dreaminess, which would be better than that misty vagueness of religious convictions, which half-earnest men are so fond of just now.

But, if meditation on heaven is objectionable, anything like a studious scrutiny of hell is still more so. First of all it is exciting. Now let me ask you, and be honest with me, Did you ever try it and find it so yourself? You are only theorising. Exciting! I should say no,—rather that it was saddening, sobering, subduing, snubbing: though, after all, if it was exciting, it might perhaps be the very thing for you. You probably need exciting. Most people do, in the matter of religion. Secondly fastidiousness puts in its objection. As noises must be kept from invalids, so all the coarse horrors of hell must be relegated to the background, and not be allowed to intrude upon our calmness or our gentility. They do no good. They only startle, and scare. Here, again, I ask in return, Is it so certain that you do not require startling? Is it quite beyond a doubt that a scaring would not be a great help to your salvation? Kindness is cruel, as I told you when we were speaking of weariness in well-doing, to those who have taken opium. In order that it may be more really kind, it walks them about, when they piteously entreat to lie down and sleep. It beats them on the soles of their feet, and on the palms of their hands. It chafes them, until they are scarified. What if modern spirituality has something analogous to opium in it? In

that case a similar treatment of the patient might be recommended.

But I am not contented with this answer. I would ask some further questions; for this is an important matter. Who made these "coarse horrors?" God. Then they must be worthy of Him, and in some way manifest His perfections? Assuredly. Now did He make them with the intention that they should be concealed and unknown? Did He wish sinners to remain in ignorance of them, that so the intensity of their punishment should take them by surprise when they died? If so, why did He reveal them? If so, why did our meek, gentle, loving Lord talk of the undying worm, and the unquenched fire, and the outer darkness, and the weeping, and the wailing, and the gnashing of teeth? Why did He repeat His words about the worm and the fire, like the burden of a song, as if He wished to impress them upon us? Why did He bid His sweet-tongued disciple St. John to speak twice of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? Surely He meant hell to be made much of, and diligently pondered. The old spirituality which put the Four Last Things so prominently forward in its system, was more evangelical, than the fastidious system which proclaims the new principle of keeping out of sight those frightening objects, of which the Old Testament says,\* that he who remembers them shall never sin, and the apostles, that knowing the terror of the Lord they persuade men.† Is it really meant to assert that, in these polished days, religion is to be allowed no office except to soothe? Who can help being reminded of those scriptures, wherein, twice over,‡ Jeremias makes God to say, They healed the breach of the daughter of my people disgracefully, saying, Peace, Peace; and there was no peace;

\* Ecclus. vii. 40.

† 2 Cor. v. 11.

‡ Jer. vi. 14. viii. 11.

or again, where Ezekiel speaks of the spiritual directors of his day,\* Woe to them that sew cushions under every elbow, and make pillows for the heads of persons of every age?

I grant that there is one thing in modern spirituality, which does tend to make a definite and detailed consideration of hell unpractical. It is that its largeness, its laxity, and its opiates make every one take for granted, that he at least shall never go there. It insures salvation to any one. It bids us cast out fear, as if we already had perfect love. The question, which God leaves to hang in doubt, it solves and settles, in order to annihilate the doubt because it is a painful and disturbing one. In a prison, a hulk, a convict settlement, or among the exceedingly poor, we are at liberty to use hell. It is a vulgar subject for vulgar minds. Alas! if our languishing upper-class piety did but so much as dream of the realities of grace which there are among the exceedingly poor, it might blush for the child's play of devotion, with which it strives to gild its worldliness without subduing self!

Once more; we are told to be chary in bringing hell forward, inasmuch as in these days it angers men rather than cows them, and is suggestive of temptations against the faith, and of irritabilities against God's dominion and sovereignty. But at this rate we may go on keeping back first one part of God's revelation, and then another. Each age has some portion of divine truth, of which it is specially impatient. God knew all this when He gave revelation to men. He does not bring forward a dispensation every century. He does not give each generation a bible of its own. He does not condescend so far to the noisy trivialities which strut across history, and call themselves the spirit of the age. Each century makes too much of itself,

\* *Ezech. xiii. 18.*

and is mistaken both in thinking itself so very peculiar, and in considering its peculiarities to be of much consequence. If men are rather irritated than frightened by the preaching of hell, it is certainly an index that the gift of faith is less abundant or less vigorous; but it is no argument against bringing forward a part of divine truth, which will find souls to save, even though others may rebel. Our Lord foresaw that His Gospel would be a stumblingblock, and St. Paul found that it looked like foolishness to many. As I said before, God knew all this, and yet revealed it; and in all the nineteen centuries of the Gospel there has never been one heretofore, whose spirituality was not fed from the contemplation of the Four Last Things. As to these temptations against the faith, which, like exacting invalids, claim such a specialty of delicate forbearance, I get to respect them less the older I grow. They abound in unreality. They are the most unearnest of temptations. They are not unfrequently a form of conceit in the young, and a mode of self-importance in the middle-aged. I have so often been taken in by them, that I find it difficult to treat them as gravely as I wish to do, or to give a very careful attention to them; they mean so much less than they sound, and so much less than those, who utter them, imagine. I see a real, good, solid, wholesome work to be done in real, good, solid, wholesome souls, by frequent meditation on hell; and I cannot bring myself to sacrifice it to the sickly insincerities and dishonest ignorances, out of which so large a proportion of temptations against the faith arise.

I cannot, therefore, concede all that these various objections imply. But I know that no private opinions are so obstinate as those which concern practical religion; and therefore I am willing to concede part for the present, in the hope of gaining the whole from you hereafter. I should

like to take the old-fashioned heaven and the old-fashioned hell, and put them in their old places. But you would not go along with me. Let us, therefore, make a compromise. You shall at least admit the principle of finding a motive in rewards and punishments. You shall stoop to be more mercenary and self-interested about your own salvation. Meanwhile I will be content to bring heaven before you with the heaven left out, that is without the Beatific Vision ; as it seems that it is the theology of the Vision which is considered so fanciful, and too unlike our present joys to exercise much of a practical influence over us. Most men, especially if their family ties and domestic affections are very strong, are tempted to wish for an eternity of virtuous earth ; not a mere everlasting Bagdad of the Arabian Nights, not a mere unending "golden prime of the good Haroun Alraschid," but really an eternity of virtuous earth, a soul of developed faculties, a finer field of action, the negation of all kinds of unhappiness, and, above all, the old penates, the well-known household gods, gathering round him without danger of parting or growing old. This I must heighten, modify, and scripturalise a little ; but still there shall be no inexplicable Vision, with its wordless beauties and its unimaginable splendours. In like manner, in the hell I put before you, there shall be no stress laid upon the indescribable pain of losing God ; and I will also leave out the fire, the worm, the brimstone, the weeping, the wailing, and the gnashing of teeth. This is the only heaven many so-called good people care to reach : this is the only hell many so-called good people think they are called upon to avoid. Moreover it is the only hell they will consent to look at, as in keeping with the decencies and proprieties of polite life. I believe the cause of inward repentance will gain even by the consideration of such modified rewards and punishments as these : a truly sober heaven for un-



imaginative men, a truly inoffensive hell for the squeamishness of modern discretion !

Now let us come down from the crazy heights of detachment, pure love, and other attainments of the saints, among which we have been wandering to no purpose in our dreams, while in our waking hours we have just eaten, and drunk, and spoken, and slept, and enjoyed ourselves as we pleased, in the midst of modern comforts. Let us look at our promised reward, at what David calls God's retribution ; and let us see if looking at it will not hinder our fainting so often, and falling so far short in the observance of the Ten Commandments and in the conscientious discharge of our relative duties. Leaving all mysteries aside, what kind of a life shall we lead in heaven ?

First of all, it is a life of inability to sin. Who is not burdened by his proneness to evil ? Who is not vexed with the facilities of sin. It is true we love God poorly. Yet we love Him well enough to make it a positive pain to us to offend Him. Even in our present state of low attainments there is something wonderfully attractive in a life of inability to sin. But it would be much more so, if we loved as the saints loved. It will be much more so, by God's grace, before we have done. Then think also of the painful ascetic vigilance which we are now obliged to keep up. That will all be gone. There will be no more possible discomfort of conscience. It will be the joy of our life to be secure, that all we do will be sweet music and beautiful worship in the sight of God. But this is not all. Our life will be one of facility in worship, of an endless unintermitting inundation of spiritual sweetness. We read wonderful things of this sweetness in the lives of the saints. We have had no such experiences as theirs. But we have had, from time to time, little tastes of sweetness ; and what have they been like ? Now let us be deliberate. I think that, with-

out any exaggeration, life has never given us anything like them. They have been few, and transient, and doubtless of the lowest kind. Yet the joy of them was not a thing to put into words, it was so very, very sweet. But heaven will be always that. No! not so. Heaven, the lowest heaven for the lowest of us, will be a life of spiritual sweetness far beyond what the highest saints have ever experienced on earth. Now we have to strive, in order to pray. It is hard to keep our thoughts up to God. But in heaven no sort of effort will be required; but we shall enjoy a most delightful facility in the most sublime and ecstatic contemplations, with the keenest sensations of delight, of which the raptures of the world's most glorious artists, in the heat of their grand creations, are but an unworthy figure. All this will be continuous and unwearied, and yet ever gushing, as it were, afresh and anew from the glad soul, accompanied with such magnificent expansions both of intellect and heart as are beyond our present dreams, even when they are boldest and wildest.

Then think of the life of peace in heaven. Peace! let us stay to suck the word as if it were a honeycomb. Peace! Peace! how unlike life, how unlike earth, how unlike even the fatiguing activities of grace! How we have longed for it all life through, and long for it now, alas! more than we long for God! Imagination can hardly picture to itself a life without trouble or distrust, a life without a past to excite regrets, or a present to gall with a yoke, or a future all dim and misty in its uncertainty. The sleep of happy honest labour is an image of this delicious calm. The way in which land and sea, lakes and woodlands, as if their display of morning beauty had tired them, seem to lie down afresh, and sleep in the noonday sun, is an emblem of our heavenly rest. The starry skies at soundless midnight give us a feeling which we cannot express, but which helps us to a notion of

the utter peace of that blissful Hereafter. Yet, after all, it is like no other peace ; for it is a participation in that peace of God which overpasses human understanding. Can all this be for us ? Is it actually one of our possibilities ? Nay more than that, nearer than that, likelier than that. An ocean of heavenliest peace, bound in mysterious and glad tranquillity, inviting us to sail upon its bosom, onward into brightness for ever and for ever,—Oh if this were all, if there were nothing but this peace, is it not a more than sufficient reward for a long life of austere holiness ?

Then, after the resurrection, there are the pleasures of sense. Who can tell the powers of enjoyment which there will be in the glorified bodies of the just, raised up in the likeness of Jesus ? In this world of faith, the senses seem stronger than God, because we do not yet see Him. They lead all men captive with a passionate captivity. Other pleasures, marvellous as they are, exercise no such thralldom over our souls. The world goes wild with the intoxicating enchantments of sensual pleasures. How exquisite they are ! Think of the delight of the eye in contemplating the beauties of nature, and expatiating over magnificent scenery, or feeding itself on some fascinating work of art. Or, again, reflect how the ear revels in sweet sounds and is entranced with the spells of music. Hours pass, and the lapse of time is all unheeded. The rest of the outer world has faded away, and the soul hangs over the abysses of harmony, as if it would break away from the body, and drown itself in those deeps of wavy sound for ever. Or, again, think with what exquisite tranquil encroachment the odours of sweet flowers and aromatic gums steal over us, and dislodge cares, and weariness, and revive the drooping soul, and put a new life into us and a life of such peculiar spellbound gentleness and love. All these things will be in heaven. They will be there unintermittingly. Only, they will exist in infinitely higher

degrees than are possible on earth. Yet all this is but a little thing to say of the senses of the glorified body. Countless kinds of new and unimaginable pleasures will be opened out to us there, each one far surpassing those of earth, pleasures worthy of the ecstasies of heaven, worthy of the magnificence of God.\* Moreover we may not only give ourselves up to them with unreserved abandonment as utterly sinless: we may do more. They are not only faultless, but they are all of them fresh exercises of the grandest holiness. Was there ever a fairy tale like this?

But the sweetest of all earthly joys is love: and the life in heaven is a life of love. Love, more than any human passion, has controlled the destinies of the world. It has been historically the greatest natural motive-power on earth. Nay, what of natural brightness each life of man on earth possesses,—whence comes it, if not from love? What should we be at this moment, if we had none to love? How all our light would become darkness for a while, until our eyes could bear the light of God? Not to have God to love—is hell. Yet the love of all passionate lovers upon earth, thrown together, could not equal the love of the lowest and the calmest soul in heaven. Eternity will give us new powers of loving. We shall love with some great nameless love, of which parental, filial, conjugal, fraternal loves only represent some portions or some elements. The jubilee of this immense power of loving is inconceivable. The objects of our love will be multiplied ten thousand-fold; and yet the very multiplication of its objects will only quicken the intensity of the love. Then consider, that the whole of this ocean of affection will always be poured out

\* Il est des émotions tellement délicates et des objects si ravissants, qu'on ne saurait les exprimer qu'avec des couleurs ou des sons. *Joubert Pensees* ii. 2.

gloriously in the immortal vehemence of a spotless love, unutterably blissful because unutterably holy.

If we were bidden to say which were the greater joy,—to love or to be loved,—it would be hard to give a judgment. We all crave for love. Our whole nature expands under its influence. It gives us new characters. It converts the deepest misery into happiness, and it makes heroes out of cowards. So far as our pleasure is concerned, there seem to be no limits to our capabilities of receiving love. What an amount of it we can drink in, even now and here, while our souls are undeveloped, and our lives narrow, and our hearts shallow, compared with what they will be! Surely, then, in heaven we shall be able to absorb oceans of love: and as surely there will be oceans to absorb. Each one of the Blessed will love us with a might of love far beyond all earthly love; and the Blessed are innumerable. The wide strong fiery natures of the angels will be poured out upon us in love, a love which we cannot now define, but a love more deep, more beautiful, and more possessing than human love; and of these angels there are legions upon legions. Who can think of the bliss of that love with which the sinless Mother of God will endow us? No fond earthly mother, rapt in the exclusiveness of an excessive love, ever hung over her first-born and her only-born with a fondness like to that, which the Mother of Jesus will testify to each of the Redeemed. Shall I dare to speak of the Sacred Humanity, or of how we shall share in the love which Peter once enjoyed upon the shores of Gennesareth, or John when he leaned upon the Bosom in which the Sacred Heart was beating? We have no measures for a bliss like that. Yet all this put together, saints, angels, Mary, Human Heart of Jesus,—it is not such a love as the one which still awaits us. Glorified though we shall be, we shall still be little, finite, weak: and yet out of every Perfection of the

immense, omnipotent, all-knowing, all-holy, incomprehensible, jubilant God there will flow into us torrents of bewildering love in perpetual inundations, overpowering us with thrills of a vast new life, taking away our breath, and suspending all the faculties of our souls far, far up amid unthought-of regions of light, in ecstasies of an incomparable beatitude, like to the Beatitude of God Himself. We shall be eternally swallowed up in eternal love.

The exceeding imperturbable contentment of heaven is another feature of its life. All the joys, whether singly or collectively, are more satisfying than we believed they could be. Widened, deepened, strengthened as our natures are, each joy fills our whole nature to the brim. Yet there is no satiety, even while there is no craving. A delightful hunger for more, and more, and always more, has possession of us: but it is only the joyous, fresh, vital feeling of hunger, and in no wise a sense of want. Each joy seems every moment as if it could not be surpassed, and yet every moment it is surpassing itself, and every moment being surpassed by some other joy. That immortality should be able to endure such vehement pulsations of gladness will be an eternal miracle. Eternal! this is the last feature of this blissful life. But the word is rather music than meaning. Eternal! distracting thought even when we meditate upon it the most undistractedly! It is a bliss which shall have no end, because it is out of His bliss who had no beginning. It is a glory always in excess, yet always equable, immutable yet not monotonous, exhilarating yet immortally calm, multitudinous yet simple and undistracting, an incredible ecstasy incredibly new for an incredible eternity.

What a life to lead! But is this heaven? I answer both Yes and No. It is the poor part of heaven. It is the minor joys of heaven. It is the secondary accompaniments of the real grand joy. It is heaven with the



heaven left out, heaven without the Beatific Vision of our dear God. I have not even dwelt upon the spiritual blessedness of heaven, because I should have had to imply the Vision. Yet what a life does even this faint, thin, weak, overclouded, lower heaven present to our minds! If we were continually meditating upon it, until we familiarised ourselves with it, would it not marvellously draw us onward towards God? Would it not exorcise many a spirit of worldliness, which now dwells contentedly amidst the unrealities of our spiritual life? Above all, would it not breed in us a far deeper abhorrence of sin, a far more genuine spirit of inward repentance, a far more abiding sorrow for our miserable ungenerous past? Yet who are they who have reached that fair haven of their peace? Those, and those alone, who on earth took up the Cross, and took it up daily; and so, and only so, and always so, have followed Christ.

Let us now turn to hell. It is fearful to think upon the union of God's power, wisdom, and justice in producing this world of punishment, this wonderful, mysterious, and terrific part of creation, which is in its desolate mysteries as much beyond our conception as the joys of heaven are in their resplendency. Nevertheless we will leave the Great Evil, the loss of God, out of view, and all the horrible details of the cruelties of physical torture. Bating all these things, what sort of a life will the life in hell be, after the resurrection?

It will be a life where every act is the most hateful and abominable wickedness. We shall understand sin better then, and be able more truly to fathom the abysses of its malice. Yet every thought we think, every word we speak, every action we perform, we shall be committing sin, and committing it with a guilty shame and terror which will be insupportable. Even the sins of others will be excruciating

tortures to us. If we were awakened at midnight in our houses, and held by strong men in the lone darkness, while their accomplices were murdering before our eyes some one whom we loved most tenderly, how terrible, how desperate, would the torture be! Our reason would be not unlikely to give way. The agonising moan, the wild enquiring eye so glazily fixed upon us, the pale contracted face of the sufferer, the fiendlike gestures of the murderers, and the staring red stain everywhere,—these would haunt us all through life. Yet I suppose the sight of the hideous wickedness of hell must be incomparably more horrible than this. Nevertheless amid it all we have to live, as best we may, eternally, drowned in shame and misery and hopelessness.

It is a life, for I will speak of it in the present tense, in which all possible kinds of bodily agony are united in the highest degree. Think of the countless diseases to which men may be subjected. Some of them kill with sheer pain in a few moments. Every limb, every deeply hidden nerve, every cell which life informs, has a cluster of torments belonging to itself. Think only of what the head, the teeth, the ears, the eyes can suffer! Then consider all the variety of wounds which may be inflicted upon our wincing flesh and our tingling bone, whether upon a field of battle, or in surgical operations. Consider also the exquisite ingenuity of the tortures of mediæval prisons, or of the inhuman contrivances from which the criminal law of England and Scotland has not been free till quite late in modern history. All these, always at the highest stretch, always up to the point of the intolerable and beyond it,—such is the life of hell. Nay it is not such; for, besides these, there will be an excess of new undreamed-of tortures of our flesh, which has lost even the poor mercy of being able to lie down and die.

This is terrible: but to this you must add the mental

agonies of hell. Envy, despair, spite, rage, gloom, sadness, vexation, wounded sensitiveness, weariness, loathing, oppression, grief, dejection, wildness, bitterness,—all these are there, in all their kinds, and in unspeakable intensity. Think of a violent access of sorrow now, think of the rawness of lacerated feeling, think of a day's leaden load of dark oppression. Now, without pause, without alleviation, without even vicissitude of suffering, here is a blank, huge, superincumbent eternity of all these things, with an undistracting multiplicity of wretchednesses far beyond the worst degrees they could ever reach on earth. But earth does not half exhaust the mind's power to suffer, either in degree or kind. The life in hell will disclose to us indescribable novelties of unhappiness. Our vast immortal spirits will become alive with misery and woe. New faculties of wretchedness will spring to life. We shall be for ever discovering new worlds of intensest sorrow, of most intolerable anguish. But is this to be endured? It must be endured. We must lie there in disconsolate helplessness for ever. Our minds have lost also their last poor mercy of being able to go mad.

The life in hell is a life also, from which there is a total absence of sympathy and love. This is an easy thing to say; but it is not easy to penetrate into its significance. The mind loses itself when it attempts to traverse an interminable desert eternity, where no flowers of love, nor even their similitude, can grow. Shall a kind voice never speak to us more? Shall a kind eye never look at us again? Shall even the hearts of the Blessed in heaven, who loved us once with such surpassing tenderness, only beat the more happily because the justice of God is done upon us forlorn impenitent offenders? Who can live without love? I know not: I cannot think how it can be: but I know that we must live without it there. Nay, more than this; hatred will be all

around us. Every lost soul, every lost demon, will hate us, hate us individually with a concentration of rage and hatred, which it is terrible to think of. There is something insupportable in being hated, something maddening. Even when we are hated, though few men are really hated with a genuine hatred, by only one man, and unjustly, and with love all round us, coming in from every other point of the compass, see how we run to God, and cling to Him, that He may make up to us what we are suffering, and take our part, as a just Father, against our unjust brother! But in hell we shall be inundated with scorn and rage and hatred, and we shall, one while, cower in our shame, as knowing how richly a confirmed enemy of God merits even more than this; and then, another while, we shall rave with equal scorn, and rage, and hatred against every one else, even while we are being crushed by the hollow, vacant impotence of our unutterable fury. A life of universal hatred, sinking ever lower and lower in the depths of torturing shame, with screams of rage which are not madness, but a concentrated intelligent misery,—this is the life of hell, the life that follows upon an over-estimate of earthly love.

The life in hell is also a life of terror. Fear may be reckoned as one of the greatest tortures to which human nature can be submitted. It “betrays the succours of reason” without bringing also the unconsciousness of insanity. It is hard to say whether the visible approach of some great evil, or the agony of an uncertain evil, or the distracted fright of a present evil, may be considered as the worst to bear. Ordinarily speaking, life is not greatly tortured by fear. It is, for the most part, but an occasional visitant, and an extremely transient one. In truth, life would be hardly liveable, if it were not so. Yet how its visits burn themselves in upon the memory as unforgettens dates! But the whole life in hell is a life of fear, and

of such exceeding fear as is not known on earth. It is a commingling of all unholy fears, and a commingling of them in the highest possible degree, and an addition to them of new fears of such terrific aspect and gigantic features as shall be in proportion with the fearfulness of hell. Our whole nature, keen, sensitive, immortal as it has become, will be saturated with fear. Its very pulses will be startings and quakings of horror, horror never removed but ever new, to which we never grow accustomed, but which will strangely magnify itself to all eternity. We can only picture our feelings by comparing them to the torture of a suffocated scream, when we fear to betray ourselves, or to a terrified deathbed without death coming. One feature of hell will enable us to bring this home to ourselves. We shall be in the hands of devils, quailing under the cruel manipulation of those hideous, incorporeal, shapeless, formless, gigantic spirits. They will do what they will with us. It is their office to distress, to rack, to torture us, with a vindictive cruelty and a demoniacal skill, of which we can form no conception. Mighty creatures! and yet their magnitude, their fury, their oppressive fiery natures cannot crush the wretched life out of us, their trembling awe-struck victims. To be thrown down amidst a herd of wild horses, to be confined for a night with an unchained frenzied murderer in his condemned cell, to be locked in, bound hand and foot, amidst a crowded ward of howling maniacs, all loose and free,—what light and easy endurances these would be, compared with those wild panics of terror in hell, a terror which can neither escape, nor hide itself, nor die.

It is a life also without pauses, diminutions, or vicissitudes. No angel ever wings his way thither on an errand of consolation. All the united eloquence of hell could not bring one drop of water from earth's thousand fountains, to cool the torture for one lightning's flash of time. All

is unintermitting. Our nature has become many-sided to bear its million agonies which are separately gnawing at it. It has become stronger than adamant, that it may not be shivered in pieces by the colossal tortures of those appalling, monstrous executioners. To this unintermittingness should be added a threefold anguish, which may be considered as the permanent disposition of the sufferers in hell. There is the anguish of impotence. We can do nothing. We are tied down. We cannot stir. We cannot even roam and wander over the lurid regions round about us. We cannot use any activities which might distract us, or put forth any energies which might give us occupation. We are helpless in a desperate intelligent paralysis. We cannot even toss to and fro, or turn from side to side. We are fastened to our place. Look at it. We shall never move from it any more, never, never, never. It is the anguish of immobility, under which we are helpless without being passive. It seems a cruelty, enough to drive us wild to think of. Yet to this impotence we must add also an intolerable restlessness, but an unshifting restlessness. Every limb will throb with uneasiness, every nerve vibrate with restlessness. It will peck at the heart as a vulture pecks at its prey. The soul will thrill with unrest, until it makes every sense tingle, as with burning needles, because of the unbearable torture of this restlessness. Every moment, even an immortal soul, even a deathless body, will feel as if this nervous and mental agony of restlessness could be borne no longer; and yet it must be borne still, and it must be borne for ever, and it must be borne without its ever becoming easier to bear. O that scared tumult of eternal sleeplessness! who shall endure it? Yet a third agony adds itself to the other two, growing out of them, out of the impotence and the restlessness. It is the misery of an impatience which has no hope, an impatience which can only be a spirit of blasphemy, a loath-



some burning abhorrence of God, which the lost creature is obliged himself to abhor, even while he inwardly raves with the fever of it. We cannot fancy what it is not to hope. We cannot put into form and figure in our own minds the unimaginable blackness of a soul, from which all expectation, all prospect, all future has been removed. Its only future is the everlastingness of its intolerable present. We have sometimes a flash of pain, which just darts over the limit of what is bearable, and we utter a peculiar shriek. It is heard on the battlefield when the diaphragm is stabbed through. It occasionally accompanies the crash of apoplexy. It is the body's uttermost cry. Conceive an inward life of a deep, broad soul, which shall be for ever in itself the spiritual reality of which that corporal cry is the most inadequate expression.

Yet this is the bright side of hell ! How bitter the words sound ; yet it is not bitterness which prompts them, but the intense fear which pierces through me like splinters of ice at this moment. This is hell, with the hell left out, the crowning woe, the loss of God. This is hell without the fire, and the brimstone, and the darkness, and the discordant noises, and the weeping and the wailing, and the gnashing of teeth. It is the minor adjuncts of hell, the torments to be thought least of, the miseries which come nearest to being bearable. Could we persistently meditate on all this, and still be what we are ? Are we quite clear that this will not be our eternal destiny ? Is there anything in life to be compared for importance with the barest possibility of this ? Are our lives at all a sensible effort to avoid this ? What is our inward repentance like ? What are our mortifications, our tears, our cries, our alms, our unworldlinesses ? How do we stand towards our past sins in the way of penance and contrition ? How are we dealing with our present temptations and occasions ? What pains are we taking about our reso-

lutions for the future? Even at the best, it is not clear of any one of us that we shall escape hell. To all of us hell is an imminent possibility. The saints tell us that they, who feel surest of not going there, are the likeliest to be mistaken. Have we an attachment to any sin, however venial? Are we bargaining with God, and trying to evade strictness? These are the beginnings of hell already in our souls. But which of the dead have avoided hell? Those, and those only, who on earth took up their cross, and took it up daily; and so, and only so, and always so, have followed Christ.

Now, dear, blood-ransomed souls of men! how does modern spirituality look in the soft light of heaven, and in the grim light of hell? I have put before you but thin shadows of their lesser realities. I did not think you would bear more. But I hope these thin shadows will lead you on, until the old-fashioned heaven and the old-fashioned hell come into you, and take their right place in your spiritual life. By the light of these things, then, what judgment shall we pass on much of the popular spirituality of the day? On that jumble of theatres, operas, balls, shows, pageants, and expensivenesses, with churches, hospitals, confessionals, altar-steps, penances, and charitable committees,—on that neglect of the relative duties of our stations to parents, to servants, to children, for church-functions, and fancy devotions,—on that favourite confusion of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways of holiness,—on the lax doctrine of vocations,—on that oblivion of the old-fashioned capital sins such as envy and idleness,—on that fastidiousness which is the secret fuel of impurity,—on that eternal gossip of direction and criticism of sermons,—on that impatience of dry painstaking meditation, on that appetite for liberty of spirit and a vain imitation of the saints,—on that hankering after Counsels without heeding

the interior and spiritual observance of the Commandments, —on that inordinate craving for inward peace at any cost,— on all this what judgment shall we pass? Meditate on heaven and hell, and then you will be fitting judges. I do not ask you to do so because it will make you happier. It will make you happier, because it will make you holier. But I want you to do so, because gently and in time, solidly yet without violence, it will lead you to do braver penance for your sins, and to repent of them with a more inward repentance: and this inward repentance is the grand necessity of the day. I shall be more content with your spirituality, when you can say to God with David,\* in unabashed simplicity, I have inclined my heart to do Thy justifications for ever,—because of the reward.

\* Ps. cxviii. 112.

*ALL MEN HAVE A SPECIAL VOCATION.*

THERE are some thoughts, which, however old, are always new, either because they are so broad that we never learn them thoroughly, or because they are so intensely practical that their interest is always fresh. Such thoughts are for the most part very common thoughts. They are so large and so tall that they are obvious to all capacities, like the huge mountains which are visible from the plain. They require no peculiar keenness of vision; for no one can fail to perceive them. Now among such thoughts we may reckon that thought, which all children know, that God loves every one of us with a special love. It is one of the commonest thoughts in religion, and yet so amazing, that, when we come to look steadily at it, we come nigh to not believing it. God does not look at us merely in the mass and multitude. As we shall stand single, and alone, before His judgment-seat, so do we stand, so have we always stood, single and alone before the eye of His boundless love. This is what each man has to believe of himself. From all eternity God determined to create me, not simply a fresh man, not simply the son of my parents, a new inhabitant of my native country, an additional soul to do the work of the nineteenth century. But He resolved to create me, such as I am, the me by which I am myself, the me by which other people know me, a different me from any that have ever been created hitherto, and from any that will be created hereafter. Unnumbered possible creatures, which

God saw when He chose me, He left to remain in their nothingness. They might have worshipped Him a thousand times better than I shall ever worship Him. They might have been higher, holier, and more interesting. But there was some nameless thing about me which He preferred. His love fastened on something special in me. It was just me, with my individual peculiarities, the size, shape, fashion, and way of my particular, single, unmated soul, which in the calmness of His eternal predilection drew Him to create me. I should not believe that God was God, if I did not believe this. This is the profession of faith which each of us should make in our hearts. I cannot tell how men endure life, who do not profess this faith in the Creator's special love.

Moreover, we may go on to say, this specialty never leaves me. God's preservation of me is in truth a continual new creation. In some respects it is almost more wonderful, and more special, than my original creation. Other men are constantly dying. I am singled out to be kept alive. Half mankind die before they come to the end of boyhood; I am selected for the maturity of age. Must I not infer then also, that, in the sight of God, I stand in some peculiar relation to the whole of His great world? I clearly belong to a plan, and have a place to fill, and a work to do, all which are special; and only my specialty, my particular me, can fill this place or do this work. This is obvious, and yet it is overwhelming also. I almost sink under the weight of the thought. It seems to bring God so very near. Yet on looking back over my past life, and considering it especially in reference to my present position, I see, that while I have had the most perfect liberty, I have really had very little to do with bringing things about, or settling myself in my present position. It has been done over my head, and outside of me, with exceeding suavity and yet at

the same time with exceeding force. I have had very little practical influence over my own destiny. This is one side of the question. But then there is another side to it. If I am to be in a special place in God's plan, and do a special work for Him, and no other place is my place, and no other work is my work, then I have a tremendous power over myself; a power the consequences of which may not only easily be everlasting, but as a matter of fact must positively be everlasting. I come in sight of the most overshadowing responsibilities. Responsibility is the definition of life. It is the inseparable characteristic of my position as a creature. I am constantly moving, constantly acting. I move impulsively, and I work negligently. What then becomes of my special place and of my special work? From this point of view life looks very serious. Surely we must trust God with a huge confidence, or we shall be frightened into going and burying our talent in the earth!

Now what is it about us, which was the prime object of God's love, when He chose us for creation? It cannot be put into words. It is just all that which makes us ourselves, and distinguishes us from all other selves, whether created or possible. It was precisely our particularity, which God so tenderly and so intensely loved. The sweetness of this thought is almost unbearable. I draw in my breath as if to convince myself that I am alive. I lay my hand on my heart to feel its beating. First I smile, and then I weep. I hardly know what to do with myself, I am so delightfully entangled in the meshes of divine love. This specialty of God's love startles me more and more, the longer I familiarise myself with it. I am obliged to make acts of faith in God, acts of faith in all His different perfections, but the greatest act of faith in this specialty of His love of me, of me such as I am, such as I know myself to be, even such as He knows me to be. Deeper and



perpetually deeper, taller and perpetually taller, the shadow of my responsibilities is cast upon me. But it is not a dark shadow, not depressing but inspiring, sobering but not paralyzing. I see plainly that my love of God must be as special as God's love of me. I must love Him out of my special place, love Him through my special work : and what is that place, what is that work ? Is not this precisely the question of questions ?

Whatever God does, teaches us lessons. Each one of His works has many significances. All possible interpretations are true, so long as they be worthy of His majesty. At the very outset the specialty of God's love of us teaches us some lessons, which we must at least enumerate before we go further. The first is that there is no service of God except that of love. We must love Him with a hopeless love, despairing of our ever being able to love Him as we ought. We must love Him with a brave love, which indeed calculates grace, but does not calculate difficulties. We must love Him with a swift, pushing love, which, like a tree, is fastening itself deeper in the ground with its roots, while it is also climbing higher into the blue sky. God's love of us is so bewilderingly great, and so bewilderingly special, that we must love Him with a glorious love, to be worthy of the name of love at all. But this specialty of His love also teaches us to be afraid. Our love will be no worse for this, but all the better. It is indeed a fearful thing to have to do with God. It is fearful to think how much He expects of us, and yet with what justice He expects so much. It is fearful to think of the sea of grace around us, which so much love, and so special a love, implies. It is fearful to think how easily we may slide out of our place, how easily we may miss of our work ; and then whither shall we fall ? Truly, to wander away from God eternally seems a cheer-ingly hard thing to do when we think of His much love of

us, and yet almost inevitably easy when we think of His special love of us. That specialty, which makes His love so sweet, is just the thing which makes our responsibilities so terrible. Even human love is half fear, and more than half fear when it is more than commonly sweet. What then shall we say of divine love? At least this, that he, who loves most, fears most.

Furthermore, the specialty of God's love impresses upon us the necessity of slowness in our dealings with Him. It must not be the slowness of unwilling service or of frightened service. It must be a prompt and generous slowness; only it must be slow. There is no hurry in eternal things. We must indeed run to do the commandments of God; but we must run cautiously, and look about us while we run. A man must move very cautiously among complicated machinery, especially machinery which is as swift and powerful as it is complicated. If we are not slow, we shall miss things. We shall miss seeing God, and miss hearing Him also. We shall not do our work well, and we shall leave the places, where we have worked, littered and untidy. We can hardly be reverent unless we are slow. We cannot speak, even to utter acts of love, when we have run ourselves out of breath by our precipitation. We have to do with a God, who paused tranquilly for four thousand years, when the world was falling into the dismal abyss for want of Jesus. What is special needs to be exact; and all accuracy takes time. So in this sense, we must in the spiritual life let God do the swiftness, and we must do the slowness. Then, once more, the specialty of God's love teaches us that we must confine and concentrate ourselves very determinately on our own place and work, which that love has assigned to us. In the matter of God's service, generals are good for nothing. They are universally inefficient. We must come to particulars, and we must fasten

ourselves on particulars, and rest in them. Then of course it is of the utmost consequence to us that we should fasten on the right particulars. In other words, it is almost of as much importance in the spiritual life to know what to leave undone as to know what to do. Indetermination has ruined as many good beginnings, as either resistance or negligence. It is well to pause, and think of that.

What is our next step? We have seen the specialty of God's love for us, and the lessons which it teaches us. Now let us look at the spiritual life in the light of this single but all-embracing truth. The view we generally take of it is this. There are multitudes of people, who by the help of the sacraments keep their heads above water, clear themselves of mortal sin, and save their souls, through the amazing compassion of God. In reality the frequentation of the sacraments, along with what that frequentation implies, is a spiritual life. For it is a life of grace, not of nature. It could not end in salvation were it otherwise. But we generally use the term spiritual life in a more restricted sense. We mean by it, an aiming at devotion, at the evangelical counsels, or at the perfect interior keeping of the commandments. Of persons so aiming we think that a small number of them have what we call vocations. These vocations are of three sorts. They are either to the ecclesiastical state, or to the religious life, or to some very special life of inward contemplation or of outward philanthropy in the world; and these last we account to be very rare. The remaining vast multitude of spiritual persons have no vocations. They simply remain in the world, sanctifying themselves in their proper place and by their proper work. Certainly this division expresses a truth, but it expresses it very badly, so badly as to lead us to a false view. The truth is, and it follows from the specialty of God's love of us, every man has a distinct vocation, a vocation of his own, a vocation

which may be like other men's vocations, but is never precisely the same. For convenience sake we may class people in the spiritual life, according to their devotions, or outward position, or peculiar work. But these divisions do not include everything. No two of us are alike. God saw a specialty in us eternally. It was this specialty which He loved. It is this specialty which decides our place and our work in His creation.

Thus then we have each of us a vocation of our own. No man or woman on earth has the same. There has never been precisely the same vocation since the world began. It will never be precisely repeated up to the day of doom. No matter what our position in life may be, no matter how ordinary our duties may seem, no matter how commonplace the aspect of our circumstances, we each of us have this grand secret vocation. We are, in a certain inaccurate and loving sense, necessary to God. He wants us in order to carry out His plans, and nobody else will quite do instead of us. Here is our dignity; here also is our duty. This is the deep fountain of our love; this also is the deep fountain of our fear. Our vocation is as real a vocation, as distinctive a vocation, as the vocation to be a Carmelite, or an Ursuline, a Franciscan, or an Oratorian. It is less visible, less easy to describe. We may be less certain about it, and it is far harder to know. But there it is, a regular and complete vocation. If this is true, all spiritual life is simply working at random, if it is not based either upon the knowledge of this vocation, or upon the endeavour to find it out. That vocation, whatever it is, is God's will about us. He may never intend us to know it fully. But He intends that we should try to find it out. Holiness consists simply of two things, two endeavours, the endeavour to know God's will, and the endeavour to do it when we know it.

Now have we considered this truth practically and

seriously? Is it always before us? I do not say, Do we, each of us, know our own vocation; for that I hold to be a matter of quite secondary importance, though doubtless of importance. The sense of our vocation, the feeling that we have a vocation, peculiar, special, individual, unmated in the whole world, the faith that this vocation is one of pure love, that it flows straight out of our eternal predestination, that it is at the mercy of our own free wills, that all the endless grace, which comes to us, comes because of that vocation, and that it lies around us either as a revealed or unrevealed revelation, an interpreted or uninterpreted vision,—this is truly the important matter. We know neither God nor ourselves nor others, until we have this knowledge. It puts others into their true positions towards God, and ourselves into our true positions towards them. It makes us first to feel that we are God's property, and then to act as His property, and not our own. It also makes God our property. He is not only our God but our own God. He is really ours in a way in which He is no one else's, through His special love of us separately. He is not distant. He is not common property between all His creatures, though He is most truly so. His arms are not round all men, and round us amongst them, though verily His arms are so round us. But His arms are round our own selves. We have Him all to ourselves, in secret caresses, in private embraces, in a privileged exclusiveness. He is the God of our own souls,—simply, sweetly, truly, our own private God. I am always pleased with St. Jane Frances de Chantal for being so sharp with the pedantic lady, who said that for fear of selfishness, and attachment, and a want of holy poverty, she would only call God God, not her God, her own God.\* The Blessed mother would

\* In like manner we read of the Jesuit, F. Giulio Fazio, the author of the famous treatise on Mortification, that when he was dying, and, taking

not hear of it. She had been brought up in a different school. We must be of her school. We know of no such wire-drawn distinctions. We are greedy of God, and will have Him all to ourselves, leaving His infinite wisdom and power to manage how to be exclusively everybody else's God, while we have the exclusive enjoyment of Him for ourselves.

Nowhere do we find God so infallibly as in the special vocation which He gives us. But this outward providence does not altogether settle what this vocation is. It settles much, but it does not settle all. We have an inward life to live as well as an outward one, and the inward completes the outward, fulfils the outward. The inward life more often interprets the outward, than the outward the inward. It certainly is an overwhelming truth, and yet a cheering one, that we have all got a special vocation from God. Indeed I should say much more about it, and show how astonishing it is from every point of view, if it were not just now my business rather to explain matters, than either to excite your feelings or to give way to my own. But there is another truth lying close to it, which is almost as astonishing. It is this. We are continually receiving special revelations from God. We live in the midst of revelations. We are almost always inspired, not merely now and then, but almost always, and in a very true and peculiar sense. In other words, we are continually receiving what we ordinarily call inspirations. There is hardly ever a complete silence in our souls. God is whispering to us wellnigh incessantly. Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul, or sink low, then we hear these whisper-

the Crucifix in his hand, had said the words, "I wish to live, I long to die, in the arms of my Lord," he kept repeating over and over again the word *my*, and seemed, says the writer in the *Menologio*, as if he were sucking in some delicious liquid. *Menologio, Gennaio. 5.*



ings of God. This is so invariable that we come to believe He is always whispering to us, only that we do not always hear, because of the hurry, noise, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on. Thus He is for ever telling us His Will, not only by His Church and in His word, but privately. These inspirations are like private revelations to us. There are, as you may suppose, many intricate and difficult questions connected with these inspirations. This is not the time to enter upon these. I only want to put them before you at present, as part of the specialty of God's love towards each of us separately. Moreover these inspirations are immediately connected with our special vocation, whatever it may be. They are given either to show us what our special vocation is, or to enable us to do our special work, even if we are not to know that it is our special work. They are to our vocation what the sun and rain are to the seed or the growing plant. They further God's special design upon us, and enable it to develop itself. Holiness of the highest kind is distinguished by the quickness and fineness of its ear in detecting these inspirations, and by its promptitude and docility in following them.

If we have rightly estimated the importance of our special vocation, we shall set a due value on these inspirations. But as the vocation is itself a source of holy and salutary fear, so likewise are the inspirations. God ever speaking, the world ever making us deaf,—this is something like a description of our state. The very delicacy of the operations of grace makes us fear, because it makes our correspondence to them a matter of such nicety. God and the soul form a world by themselves; and unless we live an inward life in this secret world, these operations of grace will escape unperceived. We cannot doubt but that, even with our utmost diligence, we are continually missing divine

opportunities in our souls. We must strain our ears to catch our inspirations, or they will sound only like an inarticulate murmur, even when they are not inaudible altogether. Without an inward life we have no chance of discerning them. Not unfrequently they require other ears than our own to hear them; very frequently other minds than our own to understand them. This is part of the necessity of spiritual direction. We have to take some one else into the councils of our inward life to protect God against ourselves, to guarantee Him, as far as may be, against the wrong which self-love is always ready to do Him.

Many of these private inspirations solicit us, plead with us, hang about us, repeat their invitations, for weeks, months, or even years. Others come and ask, wait a while, and go away again, and return after a long interval. Others come and ask, and hardly wait for an answer, but pass on like a flash of lightning. Some of those which go come back, some do not; of those which come back some return soon, some late, some once more, some repeatedly. Some explain themselves, some simply present themselves to be welcomed, and if not admitted, depart to return no more. You see they are numberless and very various. Yet each of them is a glorious gift, each a divine operation, each an incomprehensible compassion, each a private revelation, each a distinct reinforcement of that special design for which God in His creative love fashioned us in His own mind from all eternity, when He might have made what seems even to our self-love a better choice. It makes us nervous to think of the multitude of these inspirations, their apparent waywardness, their divine susceptibility, and their extreme rapidity. We are almost tempted to despair in the midst of our own inward world of divine things, amidst all this bewildering apparel of sanctifying love. Yet, even in the case of the most

momentary of our inspirations, our sanctity, possibly in some indirect way our very salvation, may be mixed up with our docility to them. It is to them at any rate that we are to look both for a disclosure of our special vocation, and for light and fortitude to work it out successfully, and in the way of God's will. It will be part of our amazement, when we are judged, to see what a life of inspirations we have had, and what immense holiness we might have gained with comparative facility.

We must never, then, disjoin our inspirations from our vocation. It is the two together which contain the specialty of God's love of us. But I must speak now of our knowledge of our own secret vocation. I most fully admit that it is a very great advantage to us that we should know it. In fact the knowledge of it is one of our most influential graces. Nevertheless comparatively few men do know it. Of the multitudes who do not know it, some half-know it, some suspect it, some are half-right and half-wrong in their idea of it, and some have not the remotest notion of it; and there are most excellent persons in every one of these classes. Then, again, of those who do not know it, some remain unknowing through their own fault, and some because God keeps them in ignorance. In the case of these last we must suppose that they are kept in ignorance for their own good, and that their ignorance is itself an operation of grace, and an act of divine love. There may be reasons peculiar to themselves for ignorance being better for them than knowledge. Their vocation may be of such a nature, that their might be certain spiritual dangers in their knowing it, or their knowledge of it might go far towards frustrating its fulfilment, or it may involve so much suffering that nature would shrink from it if it foresaw it. It must be enough for them to be sure, that their being kept in ignorance is a work of divine love. At any rate we must all guard against two

temptations in the matter. The first is a temptation to discouragement, because we cannot find out what our special vocation is, or what special attraction of the Holy Ghost is implied in our inspirations. We must remember that our very ignorance may be part of our vocation, and that our inspirations may purposely avoid illuminating that portion of God's will about us. Many men of eminent sanctity have to live in their own souls as in the profound magnificence of a cavern, in which they see partly by the strange reflections of those stalactites which get light we know not whence, and almost seem to create it, and partly by their eyes becoming habituated to the gloom, and learning supernaturally to see in darkness. All discouragement is based on the thought that God loves us less than we thought He did. We may be confident that this ignorance, if it is from Him, is no proof of the littleness of His love, but rather of its grandeur, and certainly of its specialty, which after all is the sweetest thing in love.

The second temptation is to think that God is laying snares for us. There is often a great appearance of this in the spiritual life. An impatient and distrustful heart fancies it detects God circumventing the free-will, which He does not allow Himself absolutely to overrule. The very vastness of our grace makes it present the appearance of an entanglement. Not unfrequently also we separate ourselves insensibly from God, and glide into a current of self-will, which silently and swiftly bears us far away. Then God mercifully disposes outward events, with fitting inward graces, and with gentle mastery brings our lives back to the point at which we left Him. This is in reality a most beautiful ingenuity of compassion, and often an answer to our frightened prayers. But it has a look of interfering with our free will; and in those unloving moods, when we take everything in a wrong way, we may come to suspect the

goodness of God. His love suffers in its credit, because it has been affectionate enough to resort to artifice, not for its own sake, but for ours. Moreover God always remains essentially unknown. He, who commits himself to God, does not know to how much he commits himself, nor to what. When we follow our inspirations we always come to give Him more than we promised. Still our promise was a promise, and not a bargain. The grace of generosity consists in its ignorance of the entire sacrifices it has made inevitable to itself by its loving trust in God. When our heart is hot with love, the sight of these deceivings of divine love fills us with rapture. But in cold times, the same sight makes us suspect God, and resolve to be cautious with Him. Yet we should be greatly surprised if He was to put before us the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of protestations we have made to Him in years past, that He was to do what He liked with us, that we freely gave Him all we were, all we had, and all we were capable of suffering, that we desired to have no will but His, and that we only wanted one thing, which was to love Him more, and we did not care what it cost us. You see He has done no more than take us at our word : and we must not care too much about the petulance of our cold seasons. They were certainly great prayers to make, but we were sincere when we made them, and, if it had to come over again, we should commit ourselves once more just in the same way. Nay sometimes it seems as if we were unfairly entrapped by an equivocation in spiritual matters. We have promised in one sense, and God has chosen to understand it in another. O these are grand times ! They ought to put us into great spirits ; for they are divine familiarities, and unusual graces are latent all around. Presently, if only we do not stand on our rights, we shall be raised we know not whither, but somewhere far nearer Him than we are now. Furthermore, we may be sure that a time



of divine ignorance has fewer snares than a time of divine light. Where God is concerned, we may walk with more unhesitating confidence in the dark than in the light. There is no snare in God.

Hence it is, that I have so often repeated myself to you about the necessity of having a filial feeling towards God. I often see that you know what is coming, when I begin on that subject. You smile, because it is already so familiar to you: for a sermon, like a song, may have a burden and refrain, and half-a-dozen burdens may do duty for a hundred songs. But really anything like an interior life is out of the question without this filial feeling towards God. You must believe, you must trust. You must walk rather by your own faith about Him, than by His manifestations of Himself. We creatures are in no condition to judge of Him by appearance. But our faith comprehends Him. He is our Father. That is His grand relation to us. Any acts of His, which seem to contradict that, can only be transcendental proofs of it. The problem of the world burns in some men's hearts like an uneasy fire. But if their whole hearts were on fire with the love of God, where would the problem burn then? There would be no room for it inside. God is my Father, and He could not persuade me to the contrary Himself. This is the position which faith takes up. It is the only position on which a spiritual life can be built. All our graces have to do with our special vocation. Our ignorance of our vocation, if it be from God, is one of the appropriate graces of our vocation. A really interior spirit will see cause for special thankfulness to God for the graces it has not received, as much as for those it has received. Indiscriminate grace would have been its ruin. The soul would have been impeded by it in accomplishing its special end. It would have been either a sickness, like a forced growth, or a deformity, like a hindered growth. It is a great grace, that



our one special grace should not be interfered with. Spiritual mixtures are confusions. Who are the blind men in the spiritual life, but the overlâden with good works, the oppressed with pious practices, the overworked with devotions, the overdriven by activities? Still I am willing to grant that the knowledge of their special vocation, which some men have, is an enviable grace. But—and please to observe this—no man will ever be an interior man until he has reconciled himself to the idea of inequalities in grace.

Besides which, this divine ignorance is never total. There is always a glimmering, which the soul acknowledges as its leader. How little there was to lead the Kings of the Epiphany, and yet what would they have lost, if they had decided not to follow the star! We may take this star as an illustration to us of the doctrine of vocations and inspirations. Many a star has risen to us in the clear blue light of faith, and we have not followed it. Many a leading light has stood over where the Young Child was, as it were beckoning to us with a brightness, in which, modest as it was, we felt there was something heavenly; and yet we have turned away, and have now clean forgotten it. If we could but have hearts to feel, and eyes in our souls to see, where we really are! There are good angels round us, and graces are raining down upon us, great and small, all our lives long, and inspirations all falling upon us, thick as snow-flakes, and almost as softly and as silently, and we are fastened with a thousand fastenings to great unknown eternal purposes, and we feel them no more than a strong man feels the cobwebs and the gossamer on the autumnal grass; and all the while we are closed all round, and walled in, not so much with the sun and moon and stars, with the air and the floor of our own planet, as with the living and inevitable presence of the All-holy, who will not spare us

one moment from His sight, and who even while we sleep expects us to do our work of glorifying Him, and whose love of us, and therefore His jealousy of us, is as everlasting as Himself.

But there may be some whose ignorance of their vocation is their own fault, or, if not in any fault at all as yet, who may come to the knowledge of it by using the proper means. A man, who does not lead a life of prayer, of course does not lead a life of light; and he who does not dwell in inward light, can neither see God nor understand His ways with us. If then we would learn what our special vocation is, or at least make that endeavour to learn it, which God expects of us, we must begin by being interior, by attaining that habit of seeing in the dark, to which I have already alluded. God must be watched, in order to be known; and we must watch Him on our knees, and in the lowest place within ourselves to which we can sink. Thus we shall learn much, if we do not learn all. We shall learn enough to give us the opportunity of being much holier, even if we do not learn the precise thing of which we are in quest, namely, our special vocation. Then again, as spiritual direction is almost a necessary condition of self-knowledge, so is it in ordinary cases almost an inevitable condition of the knowledge of God's dealings with our souls. As heavenly apparitions are visible to some of the bystanders, and not to others, so God's movements in the soul are often manifest to the eyes of others, and hidden from our own. Sometimes there are natural reasons for our not understanding the operations of grace within ourselves, and sometimes there are supernatural reasons for their being invisible to us, or inexplicable. While we must be accurate and punctual in the examination of our conscience, we must also lean on some one else, and be content sometimes, and within certain limits, to see with his eyes and to hear with his ears. If

we do not lead interior lives, our whole course may be changed without our knowing it. Sometimes this happens through some little inobservance of our own, which hardly amounts to a fault, and yet is pregnant with consequences. Sometimes new circumstances gather round us, and an invisible hand presses the helm, and our life steers upon a track almost indistinguishably like its old one, yet leading to a very different quarter. Hence to our own inward vigilance and to our docility to intelligent and disinterested direction we must add a quiet observation of what happens to us from without, and which is God's external providence over us. A pondering, a grateful, pensive, admiring pondering, of past mercies is a very different thing from that sickly self-inspection which unnerves so many pious persons, and is unwholesome to all. Our past years are a scroll of prophecy, full of rules and intimations for the future. Like the prophet, we must eat the scroll, and eat it often. A spiritual life, arranged independently of our outward circumstances, and alongside of our external duties instead of upon them, is simply a stronghold of delusions.

But the surest method of arriving at a knowledge of God's eternal purposes about us is to be found in the right use of the present moment. We must esteem our present grace, and rest in it, and with tranquil assiduity correspond to it. Our present grace is the most infallible will of God. It is a revelation from God, which almost always brings its own authoritative interpretation along with it. What we want for our sanctification is not merely grace, but the right grace, the right grace at the right time and in the right place. God's will does not come to us in the whole, but in fragments, and generally in small fragments. It is our business to piece it together, and to *live* it into one orderly vocation. Like a lantern in the night, grace gives light around our feet, a circle of light just wide enough to

prevent our stumbling. But then we must look at our feet. If we strain our eyes into the gloom ahead of us, we shall stumble in spite of the lantern: nay sometimes we shall even stumble because of it, its shadows move so suddenly, and with such unwieldy strides. Our present grace is also the one least beset with delusions, and we can act safely upon it, although perhaps not comfortably, even when we do not see how it matches with what has just gone before, or how it can fit into any conceivable future which our circumstances will allow. The hours are like slaves which follow each other, bringing fuel to the furnace. Each hour comes with some little faggot of God's will fastened upon its back. If we thus esteem our present grace, we shall begin to understand God's purposes. It seems an easy thing to do, and yet it cannot really be easy because so few do it. One man is always pulling the past to pieces, while another man is marching with his head erect into the uncertain future, disdainful of the present. Strange to say, intentions are more exciting than actions, and therefore more attractive. For safety and for swiftness, for clear light and successful labour, there is nothing like the present. Practically speaking, the moment that is flying holds more eternity than all our past, and the future holds none at all, and only becomes capable of holding any, as it is manufactured piecemeal into the present. The spiritual direction of multitudes of men consists of nothing but keeping them to this; and it is one of those unlucky works which have the misfortune of being seldom successful, even though indispensable, and on the whole least successful, where most indispensable.

But we may follow all these rules with adequate fidelity, and yet not find out our special vocation. True, but we have found out that it is God's will we are not to find it out; and surely there is no repose like that of a certain will of

God. When we have ascertained that, we are contented. The endeavour to learn our vocation is the way to learn it, though it does not secure the knowledge of it. But it secures our sanctification, and therefore its results are practically the same as if we did know our vocation. The endeavour sanctifies us more than the attainment of our end, and it does so because it deals only with present grace, and so with ascertained wills of God. So long as our ignorance is not our own fault, love is all round us, and we are on the right road. To some, as I said, God gives a clear view of their special vocation. He gives it them as a grace apparently independent of their endeavours, and before they have made any. On some it dawns gradually, like a slow sunrise, and makes many a beautiful revelation of God in the changeful splendours of its rising. On some it flashes all at once without any reason that we can see, and without our having expected it. Sometimes on the other hand it comes like one of those expected things, which have the charm of always coming unexpectedly. To some the vision of it is granted, when they are yet far off from the fulfilment of it. To others it unveils itself only when they are upon it, so that they almost fall over it, and some do fall over it. Now it is plain that the knowledge of our vocation will affect our whole spiritual life. Men, who enjoy the vision of it, lead special lives based upon that knowledge. It is a great grace, but only to those who have it. It would not be a great grace to those to whom God does not give it.

But the majority never know what their vocation is, because God does not intend them to know it. It is part of their vocation that they should not know it. They even fulfil their vocation and do not know that they have done so. They have no feeling of it at the very moment they are fulfilling it. This ignorance is as great a grace as the

knowledge would have been, though it is a less consoling one. If it be less in itself, it is better for us because it is fitter for us. The size of our graces is not of as much consequence as their suitableness. They must fit us, and they must fit each other, and they must fit the end which God has in view for us. Thus we may be tranquil and courageous in our ignorance. But, even if we belong to the third class of men, those who through their own fault do not know their special vocation, there is nothing to hinder our courage or our tranquillity, if only we are earnestly endeavouring to learn God's will about us. We must not fret. Fretting neutralises grace. It looks a little evil, but it is in truth a great one.

If there be retrospect in eternity, and the Vision in front of us does not absorb us wholly, I conjecture that our life will present this picture to us. In the far back of an unbeginning eternity we shall see a clear and special purpose for which God created us, an individual specialty, which He has never quite repeated in any other of His creatures, a special attraction which called out His love to us, or rather which His love invented, and which made us more dear in His sight than possible better men would have been. This specialty decided our vocation upon earth. It fixed our place. It determined our time. It fashioned our work. All the mercies of our lives had their faces set towards it. Outward circumstances made a current which drew us that way. All our graces were in order to it. All our inspirations, like according notes in music, were a unity, and each sounded out of that eternal purpose, and seemed to call us on to its fulfilment. Each present moment was a partial development of the one grand special end: and now our glory in heaven answers to the old eternal specialty of God's love about us. The one eternity looks the other



eternity in the face. Thus we have all along had the arms of God's special, and indeed singular and unshared love, round about us, and in the light of our Blessed Home we see with rapture, that all has been predestination, and that all has been free-will.

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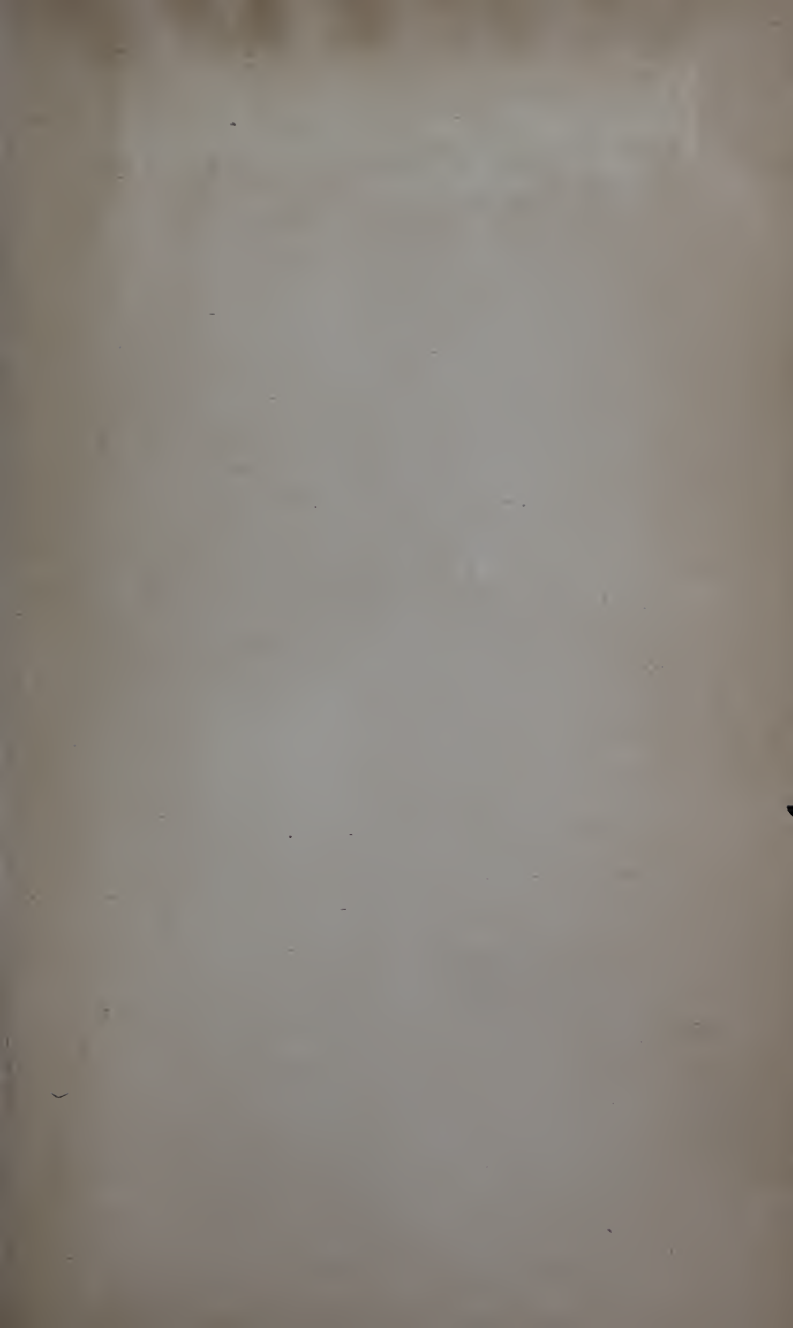
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